Chapter 5

Knowledge, context and evasion in the light of God

(precis, November 2010, followed by text still in process)

In Chapter Four we reflected on the knowledge of God as our ultimate context to which we are raised by God's self-disclosing approach. We reflected on the meaning both of 'knowledge' and 'context' in this encounter, which is paradoxical to our usual thinking about these. The question now arises: how may we understand knowledge and context in a coherent way so as to (a) honour the reality of God and our knowledge of God as our ultimate context, and (b) give an account of knowledge and context in general, while (c) taking seriously the paradox which the former presents to the latter.

In Chapter Five we explore a way of answering this question. Everything in the world including humankind is to be understood ultimately by reference to God who upholds and renews creation as a living sign pointing to himself; we now affirm that, in the same way, all knowledge and every context is to be understood by reference precisely to the meaning these two terms have when God raises us to knowledge of himself as our ultimate context, engaging us through the provisional context of creation. That is, we explore what it will mean to allow our knowledge of God as our ultimate context fundamentally to recast our understanding of all knowledge and context, becoming their paradigm.

This task is of vital importance because, as we have noted, the misrepresentation of knowledge and context in modern thinking, especially in relation to God and to ourselves as persons, conceals the reality of these and colludes with the evasion of them in practice.

Cartesian habits of imagination
*What form does this misrepresentation take? It starts falsely from the assumed existence of timeless truths on the one hand, and from a human 'self' who knows and asks theoretical questions about this truth on the other. This betrays, however, the deepest reality of truth and of ourselves as human beings. In reality God the creator is the foundation both of the world (as his creation) and of ourselves (who are called to participate in his knowledge and action towards the world); and our knowledge of God is the foundation of all knowledge. When a human 'self' and theoretical knowledge are made fundamental, all sorts of false contraries are spawned in our thinking about God, ourselves and the world. Basic among these is a divorce between that **from** which we attend to the world (viz. ourselves as subjects whether in or transcending our context) and that **to** which we attend in the world. This divorce is central to what I shall call 'cartesian habits of imagination' which dominate modern thinking. While this divorce reflects reasonably, for many purposes, the experiences of theoretical knowing and categorical thinking, it distorts the reality of our*

*knowledge of God who is our ultimate context. It also ultimately distorts theoretical knowing itself, spawning self-referential inconsistencies which suspend us between contrary objective and subjective accounts of 'knowledge'. When we take seriously our knowledge of the mystery of God as our proper starting-point, we start from lively personal participation in an **irreducibly from-to** movement of personal relationship.*

A theory of knowledge and context in general

*To start from knowledge of God is to start from a disposition at once of radical attention and wholehearted intention in which, by the paradox of God's grace, we give ourselves most fully in the act of receiving most fully. I shall call this a disposition of radical responsiveness. This disposition is dual: it is at once receptive and responsible in the liveliest way. Rising to this we at once value and evaluate, 'give weight to' and 'weigh',' try to' and' try' (in the sense of testing), and therein attend **from** reality as 'ground' and attend **to** reality as 'figure' in the most radical fashion.*

Knowledge in general arises as this lively disposition is led to subside into other, quieter forms of practical and theoretical knowledge. Here, the relation between that 'from' which we attend and that 'to' which we attend settles down into that which is characteristic of the exercise of acquired skills on the one hand and of conceptual thinking on the other. Michael Polanyi's work provides valuable resources for understanding knowledge and context in these terms. Here we set his account in the context of radical responsiveness as a paradigm for all knowing. In signs, quieter knowledge comes alive as the medium through which God engages u in lively personal knowledge.

Beyond Cartesian habits of imagination

*This sheds light upon how distorted modern thinking about knowledge originates. Modern Cartesian habits of imagination, which draw upon visual metaphors relating to location and perspective in order to picture knowledge and its context, reflect reasonably - with certain limits - the experience of quieter theoretical knowing. However, in modern thinking they get adopted wrongly as a metaphor for knowing in general, and theoretical knowing (as it understands itself) is made the paradigm for all knowing. Seen in this context, our most lively knowing and contextual immersion are misrepresented, and so too - beyond certain limits - is our theoretical knowing: the cartesian picture generates the inner contradictions and infinite regresses, as we have noted. In reality, theoretical knowledge is to be understood in the context of lively knowledge, and not vice-versa; cartesian habits of imagination thus represent a **logical inversion**.*

The logic of evasion and redemption

*Once the roots of knowledge are recognised in radical responsiveness, the place of love in knowledge (which is of course acknowledged in Christian tradition) is restored. However, this also revives the issue of **sinful evasion** as a fundamental one. This, we have seen takes two basic forms: proud, dismissive evasion and overwhelmed, despairing evasion. In the former we size upon a false integration of the world, and a false*

orientation; in the latter we are seized by dis-integration and disorientation. We may understand this as follows: in evasion, the dual disposition of critical discernment and receptivity (which characterises radical responsiveness) is replaced by the pursuit of either critical discernment (in the former case) or receptivity (in the latter case) in isolation, in each case severed from the other and thereby distorted. Here, instead of being drawn to and enlivened by God through creation in free, loving attention and enquiry, evasion constructs from creation self-displacing phantoms - spectres and mirages - which bind us. The 'from-to' structure of our knowing and pursuing, and of the objects of our 'knowledge' and 'pursuit', take on a parallel distorted form.

Such knowledge of God and evasion of God find unqualified, definitive meaning as they meet in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, and in the encounter with God into which this draws us in turn.

Existence: God, ourselves and the world
Cartesian habits of imagination posit their own account of existence itself, in which this is defined by existence as we encounter it in theoretical or conceptual knowledge, understood as the paradigm for all knowing. However, a different account of existence emerges when we acknowledge our knowledge of God, in radical responsiveness, as paradigmatic for all knowing. We may explore this by starting from the fact that existence, as denoting the act of 'standing out' ('ex-ist' means to ;'stand out') - finds its paradigm in the most lively occasion of 'from-to' knowing in our encounter with God. Within this context we may understand created existence, and also the nature of the 'existence' of that which we register in proud evasion on the one hand and in despairing evasion on the other.

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In Chapters One and Two we reflected upon the God who, in his sovereign approach, brings us to know himself as our ultimate context, revealing himself through signs within creation, and in so doing revealing the reality of ourselves and of creation.. We examined this revealing action of God as it is acclaimed in the first place through a particular people - the people of Israel - and supremely in and through Jesus Christ. This acclamation is the witness of the Bible, through which our own eyes are opened to God and the acclamation of faith becomes our own.

In Chapter Three we took stock in a preliminary way of the fact that in modern culture there are prevailing habits of imagination which tend to hide from us the reality of God, ourselves, and creation, and of knowledge and context as they arise in relation to these. To point to the reality of these is to present modern understanding with a more enlightened grasp of various key matters relating to God's revealing action in the world.

In Chapter Four we reflected more closely on the knowledge of God as our ultimate context to which we are raised by God's self-disclosing approach. We reflected on the kind of 'knowledge' and 'context' we meet here in and with regard to this encounter. These together form a mystery into which we are drawn by God, and which presents paradoxes for our usual thinking about the knowledge and its context. The question now arises: how may we understand knowledge and context in a coherent way so as to (a) honour the reality of God and our knowledge of God as our ultimate context, and (b) give an account of knowledge and context in general, while (c) taking seriously the paradox which the former presents to the latter.

In Chapter Five we now explore a way of answering this question. We begin from the truth that everything in the world including especially humankind is to be understood by reference ultimately to God who creates, upholds and renews creation as a living sign pointing to himself. Now, in the same way, we now affirm that all knowledge and every context is to be understood by reference precisely to the meaning these two terms have when God raises us to the *defining* mystery of personal knowledge of himself as our ultimate context, engaging us through the provisional context of creation. The kind of knowledge and context which characterise our encounter with God are not to be understood by reference to what we mean routinely by knowledge and context; rather, knowledge and context in general are to be understood by reference to their meaning in encounter with God.

Let us now explore what it will mean to allow our knowledge of God as our ultimate context fundamentally to recast our understanding of all knowledge and context, becoming their paradigm. This task is of vital importance because, as we have noted, the misrepresentation of knowledge and context in modern thinking conceals the reality of these and colludes with their evasion. This is true especially where these relate to our lively personal knowledge of God and of ourselves as persons. We face deeply ingrained habits of imagination and thought (which exert their pull also upon ourselves) which find the paradigm for knowledge not in knowledge of God but in a conceived theoretical knowledge of a world fully explicable in principle apart from God. I shall refer to them as 'Cartesian habits of imagination'. Although these habits of imagination have a connection with traditions of theoretical, critical thinking, they have a wider prevalence than academic circles or common-room scepticism. They are prevalent as a matter of unreflective habit through much of life especially organised, public life, shaping popular ways of thinking. Let us consider them now.

Cartesian habits of imagination

As we turn to examine Cartesian habits of imagination - their nature, and how they misrepresent God, ourselves and the world - let us acknowledge what this examination demands of us in a personal way. Fundamentally, it calls for new self-awareness, and a conversion which is both from evasion and is a conversion of mind. The demands of this have already faced us implicitly in the previous chapters; we may

have risen to them or not. Let us now acknowledge them explicitly. This acknowledgement itself makes the same demands, to which - once again - we may rise or not. Within these demands, as we rise to them, we may attest three elements. The first is the demand of self-awareness; the second, of conversion; the third, of theoretical wrestling.

(1) *the demand of self-awareness:* Cartesian habits of imagination are so ingrained in our usual thinking that even when we accept an account of their distortions, we may continue to incorporate them unacknowledged into our understanding of this account itself. Here, they do not go away (so to speak) but rather cling to us as we attempt to step back from them. Even when we glimpse that we are trapped by them in unresolved regresses and self-referential inconsistencies, this does not of itself free us from them. It is like when one tries, while laying wallpaper, to remove an air bubble behind the paper: when one presses it, it simply reappears elsewhere. Accordingly, although I warned in the introduction to this book that modern habits of thought block a proper understanding of knowledge of God, my attempts to demonstrate this in previous chapters may have been read precisely by continuing reference to these habits.

(2) *the demand of conversion*: A proper grasp of these habits of imagination calls for a conversion from evasion. It calls us to rise above evasion in openness to God. Even the demand to acknowledge habitual, unwitting error involves a certain conversion, which requires humble trust; while active evasion resists, by its very self-deceiving nature, any such charge of evasion. Accordingly, a proper account of knowledge of God as our ultimate context, and of our own habits of imagination which distort this, tacitly presents to us the question 'Is this not so?'; and for us, the answer 'Yes' is a costly personal matter - and also a testimony to our conversion.

(3) *the demand of theoretical wrestling*: A proper account of these habits of imagination has to extend into philosophical and logical matters which may appear of little evident interest or relevance for the reader who seeks to understand better the ways of the living God among us. These matters are theoretically elusive and may be hard to grasp. However, I am convinced that unless we address them, we shall find that old Cartesian habits of imagination reassert their dominance of theoretical thought and analysis and continue to subvert a faithful Christian understanding of things, including of theoretical thought itself. In other words, while the conversion I am attempting here had aspects other than intellectual, it is certainly not less than intellectual: our pursuit of the truth of God demands the most thoroughgoing theoretical effort, in order to honour the defining character of this truth for the nature of theory itself.

I have of course already encouraged the reader to acknowledge, in Chapter Four, the link between living, personal encounter with God and a series of logically odd paradoxes with which this encounter presents us. Further such logical exploration is, it seems to me, inescapable if we are to honour the reality of God,

ourselves and the world. However, in what follows in this chapter, in order to keep to the fore the main lines of the picture I am presenting I shall relegate to footnotes much material of a more 'abstract' character.

What, then, is the nature of Cartesian habits of imagination, and their misrepresentation of God, ourselves and the world? Fundamentally they represent an assumption that truth exists, and the adoption as a starting-point a human 'self' who knows and asks theoretical questions about the truth. This is a habit of imagination which originates in our experience of having theoretical knowledge of the world, and in our reflection upon this. Accordingly they correspond well with knowledge of the world within certain limits - those of the experience of theoretical knowledge - but fail to reflect the essential character of knowledge of God, or of human persons, or of the world itself as created by God as our human provisional context. Cartesian habits of imagination thus betray the deepest reality of truth as we encounter it in God, in of ourselves as human beings, and ultimately in truths theoretically knowable as well. They fail to acknowledge the fundamental starting-point for all knowledge in *God the creator*, and not in a theoretically knowable world or a human 'self' who acquires theoretical knowledge of this world.

More specifically, Cartesian habits of imagination represent a certain way of picturing the knowing subject and the world to be known which derives from the experience of theoretical knowing and from reflection upon this, as follows. It pictures knowing by reference to the imaginative act of looking on at one entity (the knowing subject) and entertaining self-identification with this while also looking on at another (the object known). There follows from this habit of imagination a theoretical opposition between knower and known, and thus between first-order attention (with the subject, to what is known) and second-order attention (to the knowing subject itself). This way of thinking about knowledge places weight upon an analogy with the commonplace experience of looking at objects. It represents the assumption that in principle one can always *look on at* a knowing subject and at what is there to be known (so to speak).[1] More precisely, its posits the knowing subject as an essentially irreducible, determinate entity which may properly be conceived alongside, and as distinct from, everything there is to be known by us and by that knowing subject. The knowing subject is a determinate reality set among the realities of the world.

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[1] Gabriel Marcel claims that Descartes and Kant 'made illegitimate borrowings from optics in their epistemology, with effects that can hardly be exaggerated' (Marcel, *Being and Having*, 192). For John Macmurray, meanwhile, the distorting effect upon epistemology of a false reliance upon visual experience is a foundational insight. He sees this as underlying dualistic Cartesian philosophy in which knowledge is purely receptive and action purely active. By contrast, he gives primacy to the self as agent, whose action includes theoretical knowledge as a limiting case of action. While this enables him to frame many vital insights, he seems to retain unwittingly the very dichotomy he has attacked so as to miss the *fundamental* role of receptivity (towards God and other people) in action and knowledge (John Macmurray, *The Self as Agent,* 104-107). For another writer, William H. Poteat, the dominance of the image of 'looking on at' the knowing subject is the key error of Cartesianism in Christian philosophy, and reflects a preoccupation with engaging the static conceptuality of classic Greek philosophy rather than the aural/oral Hebraic tradition. On the 'primacy of theoretical thought' in classical Greek philosophy and its distorting effect upon Christian theology, see Herman Doyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* (3 Vols); for a careful and illuminating study of the sources of cartesian dualism and individualism in classical greek philosophy, see Carver T. Yu, *Being and Relation.*

Now to posit a knowing subject as a reality set among the realities of the world may seem to posit a tautology. If not, it may seem at least self-evident. And even if it is not self-evident, to posit the existence of such a subject may seem quite innocuous. However, this is far from the truth. In reality, the implicit conception of a fundamental knowing subject brings with it a series of conceptual oppositions which betray the truth of God, ourselves and the world, and of the relation between them as God acts and reveals himself to us in the world.

Basic among these is the conceptual opposition between the knowing subject and the world to be known. This arises from positing the knowing subject as fundamental and therefore as having no essential relation to the world to be known, including God and other human beings; any such relation is contingent matter, which arises as a subsequent issue. We can therefore conceive a subject without knowing the world which they know, or which is there to be known by them.

From this arises other conceptual oppositions - false contraries - in our thinking about God, ourselves and the world. They originate from the ascription of various concepts fundamentally *either* to the knowing subject, *or* to the world to be known. Thus a conceptual opposition arises between *ideas* about the world, and the world itself: we conceive of 'ideas' which belong to the subject, and have no essential relation to the real world. Knowledge is then seen as about a conceptually contingent successful correspondence between an idea and the real world. A similar conceptual opposition arises between 'words' (or 'symbols') and that to which they refer in the world: we conceive of words and symbols as belonging to the subject (typically, as belonging to a cultural-linguistic subjective construal of the world in which the individual participates), and as having no essential relation to the real world. The act of verbal or symbolic reference is then seen as about a conceptually contingent successful correspondence between a word or symbol and the real world.

This affects how we understand *questioning*. Questioning is now conceived as the act of looking on at the (subjective) knowledge claim of a subject and at the world claimed to be known, side-by-side, and asking whether the two correspond. To question is to *detach oneself* from a subjective knowledge claim, and to examine it 'objectively'. It is to *doubt* a knowledge-claim. If a correspondence is found between the claim and reality, the knowledge-claim is deemed to be correct. Importantly, to reach this answer is to stop questioning. Accordingly, a conceptual opposition arises here between questioning and knowing (or answering a question correctly): one *either* knows, *or else* questions one's 'knowledge'; these two are mutually exclusive.

The same implicit conception of the knowing subject also underpins a set of conceived oppositions among possible *dispositions* of the knowing subject vis-à-vis what is there to be known. Fundamentally, *subjective commitment to* something (as when *maintaining* presuppositions, *adopting* a viewpoint, *trusting* authorities, *deferring to* a canon, or *relying upon* bearings) is seen as an alternative distinct from *critical examination of*

the same, which entails standing back from them. This conception is captured by the assertion that 'you can't push a bus while riding on it'.

Now upon self-reflection, this way of picturing the knowing subject, the world to be known, and the act of knowing *involves an unacknowledged self-placement*. It involves locating ourselves - as a detached viewer - *outside* of the subject's claim to know, *in an indeterminate space from which we look on at the knower and the known.* Further, when we question a subject's claim to knowledge, we presume to have knowledge ourselves *directly* of the world apart from the knowledge of that subject, with which we can compare the subject's claim to knowledge. We thus presume to question the knowing subject in a way which they *do not question themselves*, or *question for themselves*, in their claim to knowledge. And we aspire to do so in a manner free from any subjective commitment on our part by way of making assumptions, trusting authority, honouring values, or relying upon bearings.

At the same time we allow that the knowing subject may *actually* know, by which we mean that they may have knowledge of the same direct kind which we implicitly claim for ourselves when we question the subject's claim. In other words, although - with regard to a subject's particular claim to know - we look on at the subject as 'located' within our field of view, we ascribe to the subject the possibility of knowledge which is *free from* the constraints of any location - knowledge which is universal or 'from' everywhere and nowhere, and which is timeless beyond any particular moment of knowing - like that knowledge which we claim tacitly for ourselves.

This way of picturing the knowing subject is linked in intellectual history with the pursuit in recent centuries of modern critical theory. However, it has a longer history connected with what has been called 'the primacy of theoretical thought' which stretches back to classical Greek philosophy.[2] It draws upon the classical Greek faith that the human subject possesses within itself a divine spark, a spark of timeless, universal rationality, in a naturally immortal soul, by virtue of which knowledge can be attained of timeless truth. The knowing subject thus exists, at root, apart from any particular knowledge held at any particular moment. I call these habits of imagination 'Cartesian' because their formal adoption as paradigmatic is advanced, it seems to me, by Descartes especially in his 'method of doubt'.

I have described above how Cartesian habits of imagination lead us to picture the world, ourselves as knowing subjects, and our knowledge of the world, ourselves and God. However, this picture generates other pictures of the world. What I have described is the *primary* picture generated by these habits of imagination;

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[2] The primacy of theoretical thought in classical Greek thought has been widely noted. Herman Dooyeweerd memorably formulated a Christian philosophy which addresses this centrally, arguing that the primacy of theoretical thought - and a syncretistic Christian association historically with this - has betrayed the true primacy of what he called the 'ground-motive' of creation, fall and redemption, which indicates the Archimedean point for Christian philosophy. See his *In the Twilight of Western Thought* (1968), and his *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* (three vols), 1953-55.

but these habits now generate other pictures - ones which work precisely to haunt and subvert this primary picture, as follows.

The reality of the world as we experience it - and especially as we experience ourselves and God - may haunt us with an unresolved question regarding our hidden self-placement in the picture I have described. In this picture we have (as a matter self-evident if not tautologous) located, within our field of view, the knowing subject over against the world to be known. But this points to a commitment on our part to the assumption that all knowing is 'located'. Now this raises the question, what reason do we have really for ascribing such knowledge a timeless, universal character? Should we not say, rather, that all knowledge is (to continue drawing upon visual metaphors) perspectival? In other words, all knowledge is limited by belonging to a location which is itself unable to question these limits in the way that these can be questioned from 'elsewhere' - as we ourselves question them 'from outside'. This point is pressed by 'postmodern' theorists when they urge that there is no such thing as a 'view from nowhere'. There is a challenge here not only to the classical understanding of knowledge, reason and truth, but also to the assumption of a timeless, rational, cartesian ego itself.

Once this perception forms, the visual metaphors of 'located viewpoint' and 'perspective' get applied to knowledge in its varied aspects. 'Locatedness' provides a metaphor for the role of various commitments within knowledge: the role of context of any kind; the role of assumptions or presuppositions; the role of authority and canon; the role of traditions of rationality; the role of worldviews; the role of traditions of discourse and of the 'grammar' of language. Knowledge always involves such commitments.

In the course of all this, however, Cartesian habits of imagination may be carried over, rather than dislodged. Here the ideal of direct knowledge is retained, which we both claim for ourselves in our tacit self-placement looking on at the knowing subject and the world to be known, and posit as a possibility for the knowing subject whom we look on at. Starting from this, each of the above forms of commitment within knowledge is placed, like the knowing subject, in conceptual opposition to the real world, and is seen as a subjective matter contingently related to the real world.

Does this equate with relativism - with the assumption that, although truth exists, all that we ever have is a subjective idea of the truth, and we have no way of knowing whether this subjective idea corresponds with the truth? Not necessarily. Because we do have the experience from time to time of stepping outside of the limitations of a perspective, and in particular of the limitations this imposes upon our grasp of the truth. The possibility of this experience is underwritten by the assumption of direct knowledge within Cartesian habits of imagination. And it nourishes the idea that knowledge, although it always remains perspectival, can advance towards the truth by transcending repeatedly the limits of a succession of widening perspectives.

Thus the act of self-reference - of adverting to our hidden self-placement in the Cartesian picture - does not necessarily equate with a turn to relativism. However, it does open up this possibility. For just as we face the possibility that all knowledge we imagine to look on at is 'located', so we face the possibility that the direct knowledge which we claim for ourselves as we look on is 'located'. We see that our very claim that 'there is no view from nowhere' implicitly claimed itself a 'view from nowhere'. Our hidden claim to stand outside the limitations of perspective has been subverted. There are only perspectives, and there is no promise of the sort underwritten by the Cartesian imagination that perspectives can be widened. Perspectives are radically 'other' than each other, and the only world we can know is one in which there are multiple perspectives ultimately incommensurate with each other. In place of a community of people who enquire together about the truth, there is a population of people who negotiate and contract together by reference to their respective, subjective perspectives upon the world.

In this relativistic picture we continue to uphold our knowledge-claims in Cartesian fashion, while stepping back from them; we constantly switch between these two positions, without achieving any integration between the two. It is an inconsistent picture which we maintain when upholding a divorce in the realm of truth-claims between public facts and private or subjective values, and adopt this relativistic picture regarding the latter but not the former. Values belong to the subject, and have no relation to the real world; value concerns a contingent ascription by the subject to that which lies within a value-free world. More generally a conceptual opposition is posited between subjective *assumptions, choices, questions, interests* and *goals* etc. which belong to the subject, and the real world. In the 'postmodern' theoretical position of philosophical constructivism, this relativistic picture is applied explicitly to the entire realm of truth-claims.

There also remains another possibility. We may abandon our orientation towards truth - and thus towards meaning and hope. Here, Cartesian habits of imagination lead to a collapse of meaning and, in personal, practical terms, to nihilism.

In summary, Cartesian habits of imagination are haunted by self-contradiction. We may register this while remaining - unacknowledged - committed to these habits of imagination. This presents us with a choice. On the one hand we may register this self-contradiction as a self-referential inconsistency, while imagining to step back from any such performative contradiction. The resulting picture may be called 'absolute relativism'. Fundamentally this is a dismissive response to the demands of acknowledging the truth of - rather than 'registering' - our self-contradiction. It is evasive of these demands. It does not solve the problem of self-referential inconsistency; rather it leaves open an infinite regress of steps back registering further such contradictions. On the other hand we may yield to this self-contradiction as defeating our imaginative efforts towards reality. Fundamentally this is a disoriented response to the demands of acknowledging the truth of our self-contradiction. Once again, it is evasive.

Both of these possibilities are of course an evasion and practical denial of Christian faith. Each in its own way violates the truth of God who is 'objectively' of infinite value and worthy of all praise, and who draws us to himself in faithful commitment and good choices as we desire him and search for him and his good purposes.

What does it mean to turn from Cartesian habits of imagination to an account of the knowing subject, the world to be known, and the act of knowing, which is faithful to the reality of these?

In order to pursue this conversion, we need to engage the particular error of Cartesian habits of imagination as these have been describe above, now set in the light of God and the personal knowledge into which he draws us through the world God has created. The Cartesian error is rooted, we have seen, in beginning from the human individual as distinct from the world and as the subject of theoretical knowledge of the world. This leads to a particular way of understanding the *from-to* character of knowing. Imagining, as we have seen, to look on at the knowing subject on the one hand and the world to be known on the other, side by side, we posit an opposition between attending to the one and attending to the other; these are strictly alternative possibilities. The act of knowing is now conceived by at once (1) attending *to* the knowing subject and *to* the world to be known, and (2) identifying ourselves with the knowing subject, so as to attend imaginatively *from* the knowing subject *to* the world to be known. This implies a divorce between that which we attend *to* and that which we attend *from* - a divorce which haunts us in the question of our hidden self-placement - of where we ourselves attend *from* as we look on at, and attend *to* the knowing subject and the world to be known.

Correspondingly, in what follows we shall explore a way of understanding the *from-to* character of knowing which turns away from the Cartesian starting-point in the human subject of theoretical knowledge, and finds its starting point rather in God who draws us into personal knowledge of the mystery of himself, of ourselves, and of the world. This involves - as earlier chapters have reminded us - our lively personal participation in an *irreducibly from-to* movement of personal relationship in which knowledge and context are the occasion of signs pointing to God. For this exploration we shall draw resources especially upon the writings of an author far too neglected in general among those concerned with the nature of knowledge: Michael Polanyi. We shall introduce his insights, however, within a framework which challenges Cartesian habits of imagination in a more thoroughgoing way than he arguably did himself.

A theory of knowledge and context in general

God draws us into personal knowledge of the mystery of himself, of ourselves as human persons, and of the world. This is the true starting-point for reflection upon all our knowledge.[3]

The knowledge into which God draws us is fundamentally a matter of personal disposition, in which we are drawn by God into personal relationship with himself as our Father. It is about *giving* ourselves personally in an unqualified way (a self-giving which constitutes worship, or a disposition of radical regard[4]) in the act of *receiving* most fully (a receiving which constitutes at once being shown the mystery of world for what it is, and being raised to participation in God's living engagement with the world). I have called this personal disposition 'radical responsiveness'. Thus knowledge of God is not about knowledge which we may *possess* or have *at our disposal*, but that in which we actively *dispose ourselves* in an unqualified way. It is integrally about losing one's life and thereby saving it (Mark 8.35, etc), and about being a 'living sacrifice' (Romans 12.1), and it is *active* and *personal* in the fullest way. Here we meet the fundamental paradox of grace, that our most lively self-giving is inseparably our most lively personal receiving.

Radical responsiveness may be described as an orientation of the human *will,* involving at once unqualified *attentiveness* and unqualified *intentness*. First, it is about a will turned towards, and open towards, God (and so, implicitly, towards to fulfilment of our own humanity raised to eternal life): as was held in older Christian tradition, knowledge of God is given only where there is godly will.[5] Second, it is about unqualified *attentiveness*: it is not just about attention to something in particular, but about attentiveness towards whatever might command our attention above all, and whatever demands such attention may make upon us. Such attentiveness is primary; out of it arise those particular things which draw our attention in the first place. Third, it is about unqualified *intentness*: it is not just about the intent of having or achieving something in particular, but about desire for whatever may be worthy of desire above all. Such desire is primary; out of it arise our desires for particular things as objects of desire to us in a human way.[6]

Further - and vitally - radical responsiveness is a *dual disposition*. Here we come to a matter of crucial importance for understanding the origins of, and the resolution of, the distortions associated with cartesian habits of imagination. The duality within radical responsiveness may be described as the disposition of being at once radically receptive to, and of responsibly judging for ourselves, that which may be encountered in the world. This dual disposition may also be described as a matter of at once being *receptive to the value of*

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[3] Thus Bonaventure taught that knowledge of the Trinity is our primary knowledge, from which derives our knowledge of persons as images or reflections of God, and then our knowledge of wider creation as God's footprints. God is 'that which (the intellect) sees first and without which it can know nothing' Bonaventure, *The Soul's Journey into God*, V.4. At a more popular level, G. K. Chesterton wrote: 'The ordinary man has always been sane because the ordinary man has always been a mystic... The whole secret of mysticism is this: that man can understand everything by the help of what he does not understand... The mystic allows one thing to be mysterious, and everything else becomes lucid...(The Christian) puts the seed of dogma in a central darkness; but it branches forth in all directions with abounding natural health.' G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 1909, pp. 46-48.

[4] So Austin Farrer,.......

[5] Psalms?

[6] (on desire for God as primary)

whatever may ask to be valued (and thus being open to valuing something), and of *responsibly evaluating* the worth of something; a matter at once of relying on or *entrusting ourselves to* the possible truth and trustworthiness of something, and of *appraising* the truthfulness of something; a matter of at once *trying to* put something to use, to 'own' it, and of *trying out* in the sense of putting on trial something to test whether it can be relied upon; a matter of *giving weight to* something and of *weighing whether* something is weighty.

Here is a profound challenge to cartesian habits of imagination. Such habits posit an opposition between the elements within this duality: to our common way of thinking, we *either* value *or* evaluate, *either* trust the truth of a statement *or* examine its truth, etc. It appears paradoxical, therefore, that radical responsiveness is at once a matter both of receptivity and critical appraisal. However, let me offer in a preliminary way three examples which suggest that this paradox is to be reckoned with and not dismissed as an erroneous depiction of knowledge. These are (1) the attempt to use a tool to execute a task, in which we test a tool precisely by relying on it critically; (2) the attempt to solve a puzzle, in which we identify clues precisely by entrusting ourselves to the potential of things to come alive as that which we trust as a clue, and (3) the attempt to find bearings by which to locate ourselves, precisely in the act of trying to locate ourselves by reference to trustworthy bearings.[7]

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[7] To enlarge:

(1) If we wish to find out whether a tool will be valuable to us for performing a particular task, we will often try to do so precisely by putting it to use: it is as we *try to do* the job we want to do with it that we are able to judge whether it is 'up to the job'. This may be a latter of trying out anything from chisel to cooking recipe, from bicycle to computer programme, from microscope to painting medium. The same applies to other efforts we make to do things which do not involve tools: typically we try to find out *whether* we can master a new skill by *trying to* master it, and *whether* we can understand a particular theory by *trying to* understand it. This is the principle underlying apprenticeship. More widely, it is the way in which we learn our mother tongue, and the principle underlying techniques for learning a second language by 'immersion'. Even more widely, it applies to the play of young children: they do not have a particular goal in mind, but their exploration is a wider investigation of the world and of their capabilities with it. On this see Robin Hodgkin, *Playing and Exploring*, Methuen (London, New York), 1985; see also his excellent article 'Making Space for Meaning', *Oxford Review of Education*, Vol. 23m No. 3, 1997, pp. 385-399.

(2) The search for an explanation varies greatly in what it involves. At one extreme is the case when we ask a question to which we know a series of possible answers, and we know that the correct answer is a piece of information we happen not to have but which can be readily found. At the other extreme is the case where we are aware of a puzzle but can by no means clearly delineate the puzzle or identify clues to its answer. In cases approximating to the latter, the task of solving a puzzle or problem involves immersing ourselves in a process of enquiry in which we come to identify clues only as, relying upon what presents itself to us in openness upon that within it which may prove itself a clue, we simultaneously find the puzzle solved and the meaning of such clues *as* clues disclosed as they are integrated within the solution.

(3) The attempt visually to recognise bearings by which to locate ourselves involves more than does the attempt to identify where we are located or which direction we are facing by reference to an existing map. It involves the attempt to identify what *counts as* a fixed location and counts as a fixed orientation in the first place. This lacks any pre-existent bearings by reference to which we may identify a location or orientation as fixed; equally, however, we cannot identify such bearings in advance of exploring whether they make sense of our location and orientation within a given landscape. work. Rather we come to recognise bearings precisely from within a landscape, as we seek to integrate what presents itself to us by at once relying upon it and critically engaging it. We shall return to this particular example of indwelling below.

Note that the notion of 'determinate location' involves more than the notion of 'that which is fixed in location at a given moment'. The latter may apply to an object with zero speed but non-zero acceleration, or with zero speed and zero acceleration but non-zero rate of change of acceleration.... The former, however, defines what counts as a 'fixed location' in the first place: it defines comprehensively the meaning of zero speed, zero acceleration, zero rate of change of acceleration, and zero nth differential of speed for n in general.

The roots of every kind of knowledge lie in radical responsiveness. From the dual character of such responsiveness arises the polar, 'from-to' character of attention and intention which is basic for every act of knowing. The pole of receptivity, valuing, trying to, giving weight to, entrusting ourselves to or relying upon connotes that *from* which we attend, while the pole of judgement, evaluation, testing, or weighing responsibly connotes that *to* which we attend. Thus in radical responsiveness, just as the poles of receptivity and responsibility are inseparable and mutually inter-animate each other in a most lively way, so too the poles in the *from-to* polarity knowledge are, in radical responsiveness, inseparable and mutually inter-animate each other in a most lively way.

Here, once again, is a profound challenge to cartesian habits of imagination. Such habits posit an opposition between what we attend *from* (and are committed to) and what we attend *to* (in a dispassionate way). We may indeed rely upon *one* truth in order to question *another*, but not to question the *same* truth.

The 'from-to' character of knowing has been described by a number of theorists, some of whose accounts have been more faithful, and some more illuminating, than others.[8] Among them are researchers into visual perception associated with the 'gestalt' school, and I shall make some use of the terminology of one of these, Edgar Rubin, using his terms 'ground' and 'figure' to refer to that *from* which and *to* which we attend. However, I shall apply these terms to the whole field of knowledge rather than just to that of visual perception. I shall use the visual terms 'figure' and 'ground' because these help us intuitively when exploring the visual imagery by which cartesian habits of imagination are nourished, and help us to understand the experience behind this imagery more deeply so as to break with cartesian habits.

It is Michael Polanyi, however, who offers us, I believe, singularly rich insight into the 'from-to' character of all knowing. Vitally, the theory of knowledge which he expounds is open to (or can be interpreted in a manner which holds it open to) the primacy of radical responsiveness sketched above, with its profound challenge to cartesian habits of imagination.[9] Let us turn now to his theory of knowledge.

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[8] I want to point out here that some have mistakenly regarded the work of Thomas Kuhn as superseding that of Michael Polanyi, with its account of the integral functioning of paradigms in scientific knowledge as an assumed framework 'from' which data is understood. However, Kuhn's account is less faithful, comprehensive or insightful than Polanyi's account of knowledge, and indeed differs decisively from it. See, for example, Maben Walter Poirier, 'A Comment on Polanyi and Kuhn', *The Thomist*, April 1989, pp. 259-279; Marty Moleski, S. J., 'Polanyi vs. Kuhn: Worldviews Apart', *Tradition & Discovery*, 33:2 (2006-07): 8-24.

      An interesting, if partial, parallel to our present account of the dual disposition of radical responsiveness as giving rise to *from-to* character of knowledge is found in Jean Piaget's account of accommodation (i.e. receptivity in adapting established frameworks of understanding to new sense-data) and assimilation (i.e. critical appraisal of and incorporation of new sense-data into established frameworks of understanding).

[9] As is well known, Marjorie Grene questioned whether Michael Polanyi himself recognised the radical challenge which his own theory of knowledge posed to cartesianism. See Marjorie Grene, 'Tacit Knowing: Grounds for a Revolu-

Michael Polanyi argues that knowing is always a *personal act*. This is always either tacit or rooted in tacit knowledge, which is an act of integration in which we rely upon (often unspecifiable) clues we indwell in our *subsidiary* awareness, integrating them to a comprehensive meaning which arises in our *focal* awareness. Our reliance upon clues in our subsidiary awareness is a matter of intentional *fiduciary commitment* within all acts of knowing. Behind this lie 'intellectual passions' which, importantly, extend to the heuristic passions which underpin the effort of original discovery in the first place: in this venture we 'comprehensively dispose of ourselves', relying 'on the unspecifiable impulse of our heuristic passion'[10]

Polanyi refers to 'subsidiary awareness' and 'focal awareness' as the 'proximal' and 'distal' terms within tacit knowing: 'We may say then that in tacit knowing we always attend from the proximal term to the distal term'.[11] The *from-to* relation between the terms of tacit knowing signify its irreducible 'vectorial' character.

How does Polanyi's theory of knowledge contribute to an understanding of knowledge which finds its paradigm in radical responsiveness to God? This will emerge as we consider in outline the following elements within his comprehensive and complex study of knowledge: (a) his account of skilful performance, (b) his account of representational knowledge, and (c) his notions of 'liveliness' and 'depth of indwelling' as features of personal knowledge. This will prepare the way for us to understand how (d) skilful practice and representational knowledge derive from a primary disposition of radical responsiveness, and (e) - as signs - are always potential occasions for the revival of this disposition. This will at once constitute a decisive break with cartesian habits of imagination, and provide fresh understanding of them, of their origins and of the distortion they represent.

(a) **Skilful performance.** Mastery of and performance of a skill represents knowledge of a kind we usually call practical knowledge or know-how. For Polanyi such knowledge provides a key for understanding knowledge in general. Even the pursuit of knowledge in the exact sciences, he reminds us, relies upon the skill of the scientist: 'it is through the exercise of his skill that he shapes his scientific knowledge'.[12]

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tion in Philosophy', *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, Vol.8, No.3, October 1977, pp.164-171, p.169. I have myself demonstrated how Polanyi's insights into knowledge sometimes themselves get interpreted by reference to continuing cartesian habits of imagination, and shown what is involved in resisting this and upholding the potential of these insights to transcend cartesianism. See David Kettle, 'Cartesian Habits and the "Radical Line" of Enquiry', *Tradition and Discovery: The Polanyi Society Periodical,* (Missouri, U.S.), Vol.XXVII, No.1, 2000-2001.

[10] PK, p. 143.

[11] 'The Logic of Tacit Inference', in KB, pp. 138-157, p. 141, 144. The meaning of 'proximal' and 'distal' needs a little clarification here, since visual experience might suggest a simple equation between these respectively and relative physical proximity to, and distance from, us. However, as we shall consider further in footnotes below, when we take bearings from a distant landmark on the horizon, we attend *to* the intermediate landscape precisely *from* this, even though it is further from us. Such bearings are indeed proximal to us in the sense Polanyi intended, in the act of perception; we *identify with them* as we attend to the world before us.

[12] *PK*, p. 49

Accordingly, the scientist's most 'impersonal' knowledge involves an act of personal participation which can be understood by understanding the practice of a skill.

Polanyi begins his discussion of skilful performance by remarking that this typically involves conformity to rules of which the practitioner is not aware while performing a skilful act. By way of illustration, he identifies the physical rules to which a cyclist conforms when maintaining balance (relating to gravitational force, speed, tilt, curvature of path and centrifugal force) - only then to point out that cycling as a practical skill is not and cannot be achieved by attending directly to these rules. Rather, the practical know-how in question involves a different kind of attention to the cycle which Polanyi calls 'subsidiary awareness'. In the act of cycling, the cyclist relies upon many clues in subsidiary awareness and integrates them into the focal act of cycling. He finds another illustration in our use of a tool or probe. When we use a hammer, we attend focally to the nail we sense ourselves as hitting rather than to the sensation of the hammer in our hand: our awareness of the latter is subsidiary, as we indwell these and effectively make the hammer an extension of our own body. Polanyi sees this account as extending from practical skills such as cycling or using a tool to arts of a more intellectual nature such as that of making a medical diagnosis or a legal judgement.

Polanyi's account of skilful performance yields four insights among others:
(1) Whereas we usually make a basic distinction between knowing and acting, Polanyi offers an account of acting - taking the case of skilful performance - as precisely a form of knowing. *Know-how* is about a particular, skilful way of *looking at* the world. What is the focus of its attention? It is not upon a particular entity within the world; rather, know-how is about a particular way of looking at the world in general, a way embedded in the context of an 'the invitation to cycle'. We cannot specify the object of attention in skilful performance, any more than we can specify the rules upon which we rely when engaging in such performance. We may say, then that to cycle is to apprehend the world tacitly 'from the viewpoint of cycling'. Better, perhaps, we may say that to cycle is see things 'cyclingly'. Know-how is tacit, *adverbial* knowledge.
(2) As a 'way of seeing the world', such practical know-how may be understood as the *context* in which we see the world in skilful performance. It is the 'viewpoint' from which we view the world. In this case the context of knowledge is integral to the act of knowing itself, and not - as it is seen in cartesian habits of imagination - as something essential prior to and separate from that act.
(3) Conversely, *practical knowledge* is to be understood as an *action*. It concerns an active engagement with the world from, and in reliance upon, perceptual clues. It is about our active, attentive indwelling of the world. Polanyi's chosen examples of cycling and using a tool, with their tactile aspects, lead us here beyond the static imagery deriving from visual experience, upon which cartesian habits of imagination rest with distorting consequences.

(4) The action which constitutes skilful performance is personal, first-hand, intentional and voluntary. In these regards its involves decisively more than is involved in action by way of simple reflex.[13] Because (according to Polanyi) skilful performance provides the key for understanding knowledge in general, these four features of practical knowledge are to be discerned within knowledge in general.

(b) **Representational knowledge** Very different from 'know-how', at first sight, is our knowledge of objects and their properties, and of the meaning of words and symbols and concepts which refer to them. Such knowledge is knowledge precisely of a world of things which exist or occur independently of ourselves. We engage this world in acts of reference and predication. Such knowledge is the realm of 'knowing what', 'knowing that', and 'knowing about'. It is the realm associated with representational knowledge, theoretical knowledge, and conceptual or categorical thought. It is also the realm of knowledge and enquiry associated with linguistic (and more widely, symbolic) representation.

Let me note in passing that it is this realm of knowledge which has been the occasion of the turn to false cartesian habits of imagination. Having mastered the meaning of referents and their properties, we find these meanings self-evident, and on their basis assume a simple, direct knowledge of things and their properties. We now imagine to look on at subjective claims about such referents and properties and at these referents and properties themselves, side-by-side, raising the question of correspondence between them, while ourselves relying for this unreflectively upon own grasp of these meanings.

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[13] The distinction between personal action and reflex is vital, although often not adequately understood. Two authors deserve quoting here:
(1) Ernst Cassirer distinguishes between action by way of mere reflex and the 'symbolic act' (of personal apprehension), commenting on the work of Hughlings Jackson and Henry Head with 'aphasic' patients:
> 'There is a form of action which consists in direct motor activity, which is, as it were, mechanically released by a given outward stimulus, and there are others which are possible only' if the idea of a definite goal is formed... According to Head, most of our 'voluntary' movements and activities embrace such a symbolic element... And again it is the aphasic disorders which clearly show us the limit between the two. An aphasic will be able to perform certain actions if they are caused and necessitated by a certain concrete situation; but he will not be able to perform the same actions of his own free will, without such concrete stimuli. For this, Jackson has cited numerous examples: he has shown, for example, that certain patients were not able to show their tongue when asked to do so, but readily executed the same movement in order to moisten their lips. (Ernst Cassirer, The Philosophy of Symbolic Form, (eng) New Haven, 1965, Vol.3, pp. 213-4.)

(2) Jerome Bruner, discussing infant behaviour, distinguishes between automatic behaviour and the emergence of 'open' systems of behaviour. He writes:
> 'It is quite apparent that many biological systems operate from the outset as hierarchically organised wholes by their very nature. But it is also true that some systems achieve structure slowly and haltingly. In early human growth, the initially well-organised systems seem to be predominantly of the automatic or overcontrolled type as with breathing, swallowing an initial sucking. With a minimum of initial priming, all three of these are potentiated easily and go off in appropriate ways to appropriate stimulation.'

By contrast there are emergent 'open' systems which grow slowly and with awkwardness. Bruner considers, by way of example, a child's efforts at performing voluntarily an act of sucking which had previously been a matter purely of reflex. This involves learning, in groping manner, to detach the sucking reflect from its original stimulus and coordinate it with other systems of response.
    As Bruner points out, these open systems 'are the systems of action that become generative in the linguistic sense... it is the open quality of these systems that allows for their incorporation of prosthetic devices and tools on the one side, and of language as a medium of programming action on the other.' (....)

However, Michael Polanyi offers us an understanding of representational knowledge which leads us beyond the distortions of cartesianism. He argues that such knowledge has the same fundamental structure as practical knowledge: it is an act of integration in which we rely upon clues in our subsidiary awareness, integrating them to a comprehensive meaning which arises in our focal awareness. Knowing is always personal and involves a tacit, unspecifiable element of 'indwelling'. By way of illustration, he takes our personal, skilful recognition of a familiar object, as when we recognise our coat hanging among many others of broadly similar appearance while being unable to say how we recognise it: searching for and finding our coat, we indwell many largely unspecifiable clues. In general, he says, 'we know more than we can tell'.[14]

Polanyi grants that it *may* be possible to attend focally to clues upon which we rely and which we integrate when arriving at explicit knowledge. However, such focally attention to clues typically destroys for us their meaning precisely *as* clues. This parallels the way that in a skilful performance such as cycling, if we try to attend focally to exactly what we are doing tacitly when we cycle - to *how* we manage successfully to cycle - our effort to cycle will disintegrate.

Now Polanyi's account of representational knowledge is helpful, we shall readily agree, with respect to cases where we easily acknowledge that there is something unspecifiable about an act of recognition which takes place in the context of, and with reference to, familiar knowledge (whether by way of recognising something familiar or recognising the solution to a familiar problem). But what about our casual references to things which, as it seems to us, are self-evident to all in such a way that it seems redundant to talk of 'recognising' anything at all? What about our recognition in the first place of something we have not known before as 'existing'? These too, however, can be understood as acts of recognition involving the personal indwelling and integration of unspecifiable clues. This applies to such seeming elementary matters as (i) seeing a colour, (ii) looking at a particular location or in a particular direction, and (iii) grasping an object as existent independently of ourselves.[15] Even in such cases, there is a sense in which our knowledge is practical - it is

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[14] Elsewhere he cites the fact that 'We know a person's face and can recognise him among a thousand, indeed among a million. Yet we usually cannot tell how we recognise a face we known.' The Logic of Tacit Inference, in *KB*, pp.138-158, p. 142.

[15] (i) Illuminating here is Kurt Goldstein's research into the phenomenon of 'verbal blindness' in adults. He conducted an experiment with people who had been brain damaged and left with a condition he labelled 'amnesic aphasia'. On the face of it, their condition was that they could not match words with properties or classes of objects to which these re-ferred. Goldstein established that their problem was of a different and deeper kind. He did so by presenting such people with skeins of wool of varying colour, thickness, length, etc., thrown together in a heap. He began selecting from the heap strands of wool with a common characteristic--say, the same colour but of differing thickness, etc. - and invited them to continue the procedure. This they could not do. If, however, the strands were identical among themselves in ev-ery respect, they were able to continue the procedure.

    It appeared that Goldstein's patients could not integrate multiple concrete experiences in such a way that the possibility arose of a meaning ''standing out'' from them. Their thinking had been reduced entirely to the immediate; Goldstein described them as capable only of a ''concrete'' attitude to the world.

    Now it would be wrong to assume that because Goldstein's patients could select identical strands that they could see ''red.'' Similarly regarding ourselves, it would be wrong to assume that when as young children we first integrated multiple experiences in such a way that the meaning ''red'' stood out for us, this was a matter of our

the knowledge of practitioner - and its shares in the dynamic character of know-how. It represent a certain kind of dynamic equilibrium. Indeed, we may describe even routine representational knowledge as 'adverbial': when we register that a flower is red, we are seeing the world 'in a red way' with regard to the flower.

To further relate Polanyi's account of representational knowledge to the notion of a 'way of seeing the world', let us turn to Gestalt psychology, which Polanyi saw as having affinities with his own theory of knowledge, while emphasising that the two theories were different. And let us begin from the most well-known illustration of 'from -to' perception offered by a Gestalt psychologist: a picture which can be seen either as a white vase against a black background, or as two faces silhouetted in profile against a white background. Devised by Edgar Rubin, it demonstrates how we organise our perceptual field into that which stands out (which Rubin called 'figure') and that against which it stands out (which he called 'ground'); and it shows that this organisation is determined, at least in part, by our own engagement with the situation rather than simply by what lies before us.

Michael Polanyi writes of Rubin's picture:

> 'This experience shows us that when an area is seen as a figure, it acquires significance and solidarity, which it instantly loses when it is made to function as background - while at the same time

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recognising the common denominator among various discrete meanings already known to us prior to this act of integration. Rather we must think of meaning arising in the first place as we indwell multiple, indeterminate experiences and achieve a form of dynamic equilibrium in which meaning arises as a figure-ground polarity.

Goldstein suggests that his patients found themselves in a similar situation to our own situation when we are given a single skein of wool and asked to select others 'like it' from a heap:

'... if skeins resembling our sample in all attributes are present, all these cohere in a unitary sensory experience. If, however, they do not match our sample in all respects, but only in some, we shall experience a characteristic unrest concerning the heap and a variation and rivalry between groupings according to the different attributes. (Goldstein, 'The Problem of the Meaning of Words', in *Goldstein: Selected papers*, The Hague.1971, pp. 345-347.)

(ii) We tend to regard it as self-evident, what counts as a fixed location or a fixed direction. However, our recognition of these in the first instance conceals a lively act of integration, as the following example shows. Let us imagine we visit a stone circle shrouded in morning mist, and make records of what we have seen by taking many photographs from differing locations and facing in differing directions. Later we set about interpreting these photographs. This will involve a probing activity of tacit integration in which we come to discern what constitutes (1) determinate location (as we discern which photographs have been taken from the same spot but pointing in differing directions) and (2) determinate orientation (as we discern which photographs have been taken from differing locations but pointing in the same direction). The latter is about discerning horizons or bearings by which to orient ourselves; however, this need not involve discerning anything to which we can attend focally as a bearing or horizon, and so the presence of the morning mist does not decisively prevent us from finding our bearings.

(iii) Consider our perception of a large building, formed as we walk around the outside of it and view it from a series of perspectives. Although our view of the building is at any one moment from a particular perspective, and we have no view of the building apart from such perspectives, we form a perception of the building as something which stands independently of any of these perspectives, knowledge of which incorporates all such perspectival knowledge. It would be mistaken therefore to imagine that to see the building 'directly, as it really is' would be to see it free of perspective. Our 'viewing from a perspective' is not in the first instance a subjective *hindrance* to viewing something for what it is, as an independent entity; rather it is precisely *through the integration of perspectives that objectivity is grasped* – and only through this is the question of perspectival *limitations* brought to attention.

the area which a moment ago was mere background now becomes a significant and substantial figure. We may generalise this by saying that the figure is something distinctive seen against a background that is indeterminate…'[16]

Having discussed other examples of figure-ground configuration, Polanyi remarks:

'An object is seen as such by virtue of our seeing its surroundings as its background - and vice-versa. This… suggests that we are performing one single mental act in jointly seeing an object against its background…'[17]

These reflection on Rubin's picture offer insight into the nature of representational knowledge, but we could easily be led astray if we took Rubin's picture as providing a basic model for this knowledge as such. This would leave the way open to view knowledge as imposed by the subject upon a reality which is, for its own part, open in principle to many possible different interpretations. It would also allow an assumption that what can be known can always in principle be known *along with* and *alongside* its background, viewed (so to speak) together focally from 'outside' both of them, just as we can look either at the black area or the white in Rubin's picture. Of course visual perception offers some encouragement for this assumption, by virtue of the fact that we typically see things against a background which lies behind the object and to which we can in principle turn our attention from the object. However, this is not the case with respect to our aural perception (most usually we listen to something against a backdrop of relative silence - although, to be sure, sometimes we do so against a background of indeterminate 'white' noise to which we can turn our attention and which we can specify) or with respect to our tactile awareness, or our sense opf taste or smell. Further - and related to this - what we attend 'from' in our subsidiary awareness is not necessarily a backdrop; it may be that which most fills our field of vision (as when, riding a merry-go-round, we turn from looking at this to looking beyond, and the lansdcape seems to be moving), or that which is closest to us (Polanyi discusses our own bodies as a matter of our subsidiary awareness). Polanyi's use of the term 'proximal' (and our use of 'ground' rather than 'background' is to the point here. Fundamentally, while sometimes ground is specifiable, it is not necessarily so. Fundamentally it concerns *indeterminacy* as the corollary to *determinacy*, and the *absence* from which *presence* stands out. At root the unspecifiability of 'ground' is not about that which can in principle be specified while being subjectively unspecifiable to the knowing subject in the act of relying on it; it is about that which can only be known tacitly, in the act of relying upon it, as we enter into participation in such knowledge through apprenticeship.

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[16] "The Unaccountable Element in Science", *Knowing and Being* (ed. Marjorie Grene, London 1969), pp. 105-120, p. 110.
[17] Ibid, p. 111.

Compared with the kind of distorted account of knowing to which Rubin's picture might by itself lead us, Polanyi's account ascribes to the irreducible *from-to* structure of knowing a more radical, primary role. For him, the 'one single mental act' to which he refers above involves efforts of perception open to, and directed towards, a reality which discloses itself. The place in this of personal effort is important: Polanyi stresses that his own account of knowing is not limited to the kinds of automatic ways of seeing things with which Gestalt psychology was mainly concerned, but with deliberate, conscious, personal efforts to make sense of things.[18] Moreover, such effort is about being *receptive to* meaning. There is no *imposition of* meaning here. This is not to deny that we may bring to a situation assumptions by reference to which we sometimes impose meaning, but this is ultimately a failure of receptivity and a betrayal of the fundamental vocation of knowledge and enquiry.

While Polanyi recognises all knowledge as having a *from-to* structure, in the case of representational knowledge this polarity takes a different form than in the case of the exercise of a skill. Specifically, in representational knowledge that *from* which we attend is itself something which we can in principle attend to as distinct from that to which we attend *from* it. To be sure, Polanyi notes that we cannot do this without destroying the meaning it has when we attend *from* it; nevertheless, it has a certain meaning of its own, *to* which we can attend focally instead of attending *from* it, in a way that we cannot in the case of our tacit knowledge in a skilful performance. Thus we commonly register particular concepts side by side, where one is related to the other as a whole is related to its constituent parts. We attend to a car engine and to a catalytic converter in this way, or to a recipe and its ingredients, or to a speech and a brief press quotation lifted out of it. In some such cases the 'part' has come into existence only in the context of the whole (e.g. the catalytic converter); in other cases the whole has been created as an achievement out of its constituent parts (e.g. an appealing recipe).

Where we register concepts as related to each other as a whole is related to its parts, we meet intimations of an integral, if differentiated, unity. It is also common, however, for us to register the *presence* and *absence* of an entity or event as two particular concepts side by side. Here we meet intimations of contrast between them. A mountain vista may be seen as the backdrop against which an eagle may or may not appear; a chair may be seen as the setting in which a person may or may not appear seated; a crowded restaurant may be seen as the context in which a friend for whom we are searching may or may not appear. In some cases, such absence need not register for us at all (there is nothing missing from a mountain vista without soaring eagle); in other cases we may register than something has been made for a purpose, but that it is not being used for this purpose (a chair); in other cases absence registers for us in a quite dominating way, and we have no interest in anything except what is missing (as when we search for a friend we expect to meet in a restaurant[19]). Mountain vista, chair and crowded restaurant may attract our focal attention in themselves,

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[18] *PK*, p. 57

[19] I make deliberate allusion to the scenario sketched by Jean-Paul Sartre at the opening of his *Being and Nothingness*. Starting from this point, he constructs an entire (and entirely false) philosophy of human existence, which is rather, in

even though they may also represent to us, in themselves, the absence of something we anticipate as a possible presence or occurrence in their setting.

Both of these possibilities may be framed, in more abstract terms, as a matter of our registering two issues such that one is logically prior to the other. Without the parts, the question does not arise of the existence of a whole; without a background constituting absence of that which stands out from it, or *indeterminacy*, the question does not arise of something determinate standing out from it.........

However, the appearance in this way, in representational knowledge, of two concepts signifying whole and part, presence and absence, or any other embodiment of the logically emergent and logically antecedent, does not require us to abandon Polanyi's insistence upon the priority of the *from-to* structure of knowing, or the idea that particular specifications of that from which or to which we attend in the act of knowledge are to be understood in this context. In the first instance, figure and ground form *together*. As we have seen, Polanyi claims that focal and subsidiary awareness are not fundamentally a matter of attention to two different sets of particulars, but 'two *kinds* of attention given to the *same* particulars'[20]

To grasp this intuitively, let us suppose that, in the case where figure and ground form together for us, someone claims that there is one set of particulars which make up the ground lying in our subsidiary awareness and another set of particulars which make up the figure lying in our focal awareness. Given that ground forms for us precisely *in* figure-ground polarity, and not before this, we are not presented with the particularities of ground before those of figure. Rather, it is as we attend to all the particularities which make up figure and ground in their differentiation, that ground forms for us. Not only does figure incorporate ground in the act of standing out from, and differentiating itself from ground; equally, ground incorporates the particularities of both itself and figure in an undifferentiated unity such that, seen in the act of differentiation, it represents the circumstance that the question of figure does not arise.

Thus ground signifies the unity of figure and ground, while figure signifies their differentiation. This is the paradox which presents itself to us when we try to speak of figure and ground as such, rather than enter into them as an irreducible polarity. This paradox is hinted at by Polanyi when, introducing the idea of tacit knowledge, he does not set this *alongside* explicit knowledge but presents it as an integral dimension *of* explicit knowledge, whereas explicit knowledge is clearly differentiated from tacit knowledge by its power of articulation to others.

The fact that in the case of representational knowledge, *figure* and *ground* can be set side by side as distinct means in turn that the *differentiation between figure and ground* and the *unity between figure and ground* can

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reality, a penetrating account of human evasion.
[20] 'Knowing and Being', *KB*, pp.123-137, p. 128.

themselves be set side by side as distinct. This corresponds to the distinction which arises in representational knowledge between critical judgement and receptivity: we *rely uncritically on* ground, while we *attend critically* to figure.

Thus, although 'this is red' is a meaningful statement, 'this is red' as a *truthful* statement requires that we attend critically from 'this is red' as a meaningful statement. However, a child does not first learn the meaning of 'this is red' and then, having learnt this, begin asking about the truth, 'Is this red?'. Rather, it is through indwelling multiple experiences of being told 'this is red' truthfully that the child learns to indwell the meaning of red (that is, learns to 'see red', or 'see red-ly'). If a child was often told 'this is red' untruthfully, she would have difficulty ever learning what 'red' means.[21]

Polanyi refers to such this kind of learning as a 'dual act of sense-reading': 'An unintelligible text referring to an unintelligible matter presents us with a dual problem. Both halves of such a problem jointly guide our minds towards solving them and will in fact be solved jointly by the understanding of the object referred to and the words referring to it. The naming of the things and of the terms designating them is discovered at the same time'.[22]

The formation of two concepts as standing in logical priority may lead to a series - a logical hierarchy - of concepts. Thus the concepts of uttering a 'meaningful statement' and a 'truth' can be placed within a wider logical hierarchy: an utterance typically comprises an act of reference, a meaningful statement about the referent in question, a truth-claim for this statement, and a claim of appositeness about adverting to this truth in the circumstances to hand.

To take another example from language, we meet here the logical hierarchy comprising letters of the alphabet, words made up of these letters, sentences made up of these words, and messages with all their implications made up of these sentences. Another, important example of a logical hierarchy is the conceptual hierarchy represented by atomic, molecular, cellular and higher biological accounts of life.

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[21] This is not sufficiently acknowledged. In reality, a robust disposition of judging or weighing draws its nourishment deeply from the more fundamental experience in which we acquire understanding by at once 'giving weight to' (or entrusting ourselves receptively to) and weighing, valuing and evaluating, which we have characterised as 'radical responsiveness', and which rests upon a basic faithfulness on the part of those to whom we are 'apprenticed' in such exploration. Two illustrations of this are as follows: (1) Neil Postman notes that (...) (2) Alice Miller tells of a woman who was deeply disturbed by her upbringing, and who recounted that as a small child one day she was placed upon a wall by her father who encouraged her to jump off the wall into his arms, assuring her she could trust him. When she jumped, however, he stepped back and let her fall to the ground. he explained to her that he was teaching her an important lesson - that nobody is to be trusted in this life. We can see that this did not work because the ability to learn any lessons at all depends upon being able to trust, and her father attacked this ability to trust.

[22] 'Sense-Giving and Sense-Reading', *KB*, p.189. Polanyi's reference to 'both halves of the problem' should not be taken to mean that we are engaged here merely in seeking a correspondence between already known particulars. Rather, as I have said, it is a matter of 'seeing' something for the first time and associating a name with it.

Returning to the effort of communicating an understanding through language, how do we direct our attention when presented with an hierarchy of concepts in this way? Is it sufficient to say, for example, that we rely upon the meaning of a statement and interrogate its truth? By no means. Rather, we are receptive to an utterance in its entirety as a successful reference, meaningful statement, truth, and apposite remark - while at the same time appraising all of these. Our attention to each of these is embedded in our attention to our whole situation.[23] On the one hand, we try to embrace the utterance as a whole; on the other, we critical of it in all its parts. It is precisely by indwelling the utterance as a whole that the presence of any difficulty comes to light, and we are able to judge where the difficulty lies as its stands out against our efforts towards integration and 'owning' of the utterance as a whole. [24]

Polanyi adverts to one form of this in passing when he writes of the '"transparency" of language': 'if my understanding of the text were halting, or its expressions or its spellings were faulty, its words would arrest my attention. They would become slightly opaque and prevent my thought from passing through them unhindered to the things they signify.' [25]

On other occasions, it is not possible to specify in this way the elements being at once 'valued' and 'evaluated' in an attempt at comprehension. Consider, for example, the skill with which an experienced artist approaches an amateur painter's attempt at painting a coherent picture. Without being able to specify beforehand either the whole to which the painter aspires or the parts which integrally make up this whole, the artist will be able to identify elements within it which work against any such emergent coherence owing to (say) their location or tone or colour relative to the emergent 'whole' while at the same time belonging precisely to this whole in its present emergent state.

It is important to stress the integrity of that primary disposition in which this is rooted. As a stance of openness or responsiveness to (indeterminate) reality, this primary disposition is at once receptive and

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[23] 'Embeddedness' is the term used by Margaret Donaldson to characterise childhood reasoning. She regards it as the primary mode of such rationality, not to be reduced to what she calls 'disembedded' (and what is sometimes called 'formal' or 'abstract') thought and reasoning. See Donaldson, *Children's Minds*, chapter 7.

[24] Suppose, for example, that standing with a friend in a crowded street, my friend says to me 'That man is behaving rather oddly.' In so doing he invites me to attend 'from' his roughly pointing arm so as to identify his *referent* as one particular man. At the same time, however, he invites me to attend 'from' this referent as I attend to his *statement as a predication*: do I see what he means by 'a bit odd?'. Again, he invites me to attend 'from' his statement as I attend to its *truth*: can I see how right he is? And finally I attend 'from' this truth - namely, the oddness of his behaviour, to which he draws my attention - as I attend to its *import:* do I see that he has done well to point this out, because it may warrant possible intervention of some kind? Each aspect of my act of knowing here is subsidiary for me as I attend focally to the next. However, all are contained in my primary intention which is at once receptive to 'owning' or attending *from* all of these, and critical in evaluating each within the whole. It is as I attend in this way *through them all*, that I either come to appreciate fully what my friend says, or else find that one or another aspect of what he says stands out as problematic within the whole, and invites special attention.

Such attention through a series of questions is in some ways analogous to the act of peering through a microscope at a translucent organism and adjusting the focal plane to bring different parts of this to attention within the whole, or looking along a line of posts to ascertain whether they are upright and in a straight row.

[25] *PK.*, P. 57

critical. We cannot reduce this to an alternation between two kinds of intention. Rather, the two ways of attending represented by 'relying on' and 'attending to' arise out of this intention, as reality is engaged. To describe this intention as irreducible is not to deny that both in discovery and in the progressive deepening of understanding of a comprehensive entity, there is typically what Polanyi calls 'a see-saw of analysis and integration'.[26] It is rather to insist that each of these is guided by its immediate relation to the other, which is to say, by the whole represented by these two taken together.

It has been claimed that to try to critique one's own cultural presuppositions is like trying to push a bus while riding on it. Basically this is to claim that one cannot at once weigh something and place one's weight upon it. It is a false claim which, under the influence of cartesian habits of imagination, betrays our most lively engagement with the world.

Just as skilful performance may be more or less automatic (exercise of a skill once mastered), so representational knowledge may be more or less automatic (exercise of conceptual mastery). The common structure which representational knowledge shares with skilful performance is more apparent in matters of personal wisdom. Polanyi is right to insist upon this common structure, but we need to acknowledge that some thinking is less personal. Call this conceptual or categorical knowledge - automatic.

What is involved in this spectrum between personal effort and automatic or habitual action? What terms does Polanyi use relevant to this? To this we now turn.

(c) Deep indwelling and lively knowledge

While all knowledge has the same basic from-to structure, some acts of knowing involve, Polanyi notes, *deeper indwelling* than others. He also describes some acts of knowing as *more lively* than others.

Polanyi employs the notion of relative 'depth of indwelling' when comparing knowledge of a person or work of art with observation as practiced in the natural sciences. In each case knowledge has the same structure, he insists; both involve indwelling; the difference between them is only a matter of degree: 'indwelling is less deep when observing a star than when understanding men or works of art'[27] Elsewhere, referring to the association between indwelling and feelings of comprehension, he writes: 'These feelings of comprehension go deep; we shall see them increasing in profundity all the way from the "I-It" relation to the "I-Thou" relation.'[28]

Again, while still insisting upon the common structure of all knowledge, Polanyi employs the notion of relatively 'lively' or 'dynamic' knowledge when comparing enquiry or research with other knowledge. He

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[26] *KB*, p. 129
[27] 'Tacit Knowing', in *KB*, pp. 159-80, p. 160.
[28] 'The Logic of Tacit Inference', in *KB*, p. 149.

writes: 'Research is an intensely dynamic enquiring, while knowledge is a more quiet research. Both are ever on the move, according to similar principles, towards a deeper understanding of what is already known.'[29] Again, comparing discovery with perception, he writes 'While the integration of clues to perceptions may be virtually effortless, the integration of clues to discoveries may require sustained efforts guided by exceptional gifts. But the difference is one of range and degree: the transition from perception to discovery is unbroken.'[30]

Importantly, Polanyi finds in lively, demanding enquiry and discovery a *paradigm* for all knowing:

> 'the efforts of perception are evoked by scattered features of raw experience suggesting the presence of a hidden pattern which will make sense of the experience. Such a suggestion, if it is true, is itself knowledge, the kind of foreknowledge we call a good problem. Problems are the goad and guide of all intellectual effort, which harass and beguile us into the search for an ever deeper understanding of things. *The knowledge of a true problem is indeed a paradigm of all knowing* [italics mine]. For all knowing is always a tension alerted by largely unspecifiable clues and directed by them towards a focus at which we sense the presence of a thing - a thing that, like a problem, embodies the clues on which we rely for attending to it.'[31]

The relation between 'deep' indwelling and 'dynamic' or 'lively' knowledge is an important question for consideration. Suffice here to say that the terms in which Polanyi writes of them contain hints that they are closely related.[32] Thus deep indwelling is a lively personal act of *self-disposal* ('comprehensive self-disposal'), while lively enquiry is about the lively personal effort of *indwelling* and integrating clues in the act of discovery.

Polanyi finds in lively enquiry a paradigm for all knowing. How might this relate to our own account of knowledge as finding its paradigm in encounter with God? And how might the foregoing accounts of skilful performance and of representational knowledge relate to our own account? To this question we now turn.

(d) **Knowledge of God as our primary, paradigmatic knowledge**

We have claimed that the roots of all knowledge lie in that radical responsiveness in which give ourselves in an unqualified personal way so as to seek and know God. Within such radical responsiveness, the poles of our receptivity and critical appraisal interanimate each other in a most lively way; we remain alive to the further demands which each of these makes upon us. Encounter with God is thus a matter of endless further

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[29] 'Knowing and Being', in *KB*, pp. 123-137, p. 132.
[30] 'The Logic of Tacit Inference', in *KB*, pp. 138-157, p. 139.
[31] 'The Unaccountable Element is Science', in *KB*, pp. 105-120, p. 117.
[32] There appear ambiguities in Polanyi's position here. In our own account, knowledge of God involves a disposition at once of unqualified indwelling and immeasurable vitality, through the irreducible polarity of receptivity and judgement. See the footnote following on Polanyi's understanding of worship.

seeking and knowing, desiring and enjoying God; it is a matter at once of orientation towards and participation in unqualified vitality of knowing and unfathomable indwelling in the mystery of God.[33]

Polanyi's references to lively knowledge, to deep indwelling, and to the paradigmatic status of lively enquiry may be understood in these terms. We may similarly understand how knowledge in general arises as the lively disposition of radical responsiveness is led to subside into other, quieter forms of practical and theoretical knowledge. In particular, we can see how mastery of a skill and conceptual knowledge, as we have described them with Polanyi's help in this chapter, arise as this lively disposition subsides in one of two basic ways. In each case the vital interanimation of that 'from' which we attend and that 'to' which we attend settles down in a distinctive way, as follows.

In *mastery of a skill*, the lively dual disposition of radical responsiveness subsides as the vital interanimation of subsidiary and focal awareness settles into a particular, tacit, practical way of seeing the world. Beginning with radical attentiveness to the world, in a dual disposition of receptivity and critical discernment, we find that the question of further critical discernment no longer arises, but only the question of further receptivity. That is to say, the question of further critical discernment no longer arises 'is this a (determinate) way of seeing the world? Let me judge...', but only the question of further receptivity 'can I see the world in this way? Let me see if I can…' Here receptivity and critical appraisal converge: one 'tries/tests whether' one can perform an skilful act precisely as one 'tries to' perform it, and this - within the performance of a skill once mastered - reduces to an act performed to some measure in a routine way, 'automatically' or in an 'habitual' way. Thus when we master the skill of cycling, our primary, full attentiveness to the world subsides into a particular way of seeing the world - that is, in a 'cycling' way. Any further question regarding what it means to cycle reduces to the act of attending, in an immediate practical way, to exercising of one's cycling skill in the same moment.

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[33] Polanyi's account of paradigmatic knowledge raises questions here. In our own account, liveliness of knowing and deep indwelling are inseparable. For Polanyi however, for all that he writes of these in some kindred terms, in his discussion of 'dwelling in and breaking out' (*PK*, p.195ff), he seems to draw a *contrast* between indwelling and lively research. In relation to the former he speaks of conceptual frameworks as 'screens' between ourselves and things which we observe and manipulate through them. In relation to the latter, he says that as we 'break out' of such frameworks in 'phases of self-destruction', we have 'direct experience' of contents in an 'intense if transient moment of heuristic vision'. This is hardly to present indwelling as paradigmatic for research or knowledge.

It is true that Polanyi goes on to describe this moment of 'breaking out' in terms reminiscent of indwelling. Such contemplation, he says, 'pours us straight into experience; we cease to handle things and become immersed in them', which brings 'complete participation of the person in that which he contemplates'. Moreover, he can speak of the 'indwelling of the Christian worshipper' - 'potentially the highest degree of indwelling that is conceivable' - *as* indwelling despite that fact that he describes this as 'a continued attempt at breaking out' which is 'fulfilled most completely when it increases this effort to the utmost'. When he now describes this as resembling 'the heuristic upsurge which strives to break through the accepted frameworks of thought, guided by the intimations of discoveries still beyond our horizon', we seem to be right back with his description of lively research - except that there guiding intimations lead us precisely to *indwell clues*, rather than to *break out of indwelling*. Our own proposal here is for a 'radical' reading of Polanyi which restores indwelling as integral to lively research, and therefore paradigmatic, so that the 'breaking out' which Polanyi describes may properly be understood as *a renewal of indwelling at its most vital*.

In *conceptual knowledge*, the lively dual disposition of radical responsiveness subsides as the vital interanimation of subsidiary and focal awareness settles into focal awareness of a figure and subsidiary awareness of a concept which has been formed and may be specified as distinct from it. Beginning with radical attentiveness to the world, in a dual disposition of receptivity and critical discernment, we find that the question of further receptivity no longer arises, but only the question of further critical discernment. Receptivity and critical appraisal diverge. With respect to receptivity: having formed a concept, our attention to this - in our subsidiary awareness - becomes to good measure a routine affair, something automatic, and our receptivity becomes for us a matter of habitual reliance upon it. With respect to critical discernment: having formed a concept, our attention to the world - in our focal awareness - is a matter of appraisal by reference to this. Thus once we have formed the concept 'red', the question of further receptivity no longer arises, 'can I master the act of seeing red? Let me try...', but only the question of further critical discernment: 'is this red?'. Discernment proceeds by reference to an established meaning; receptivity subsides into a matter of indwelling this meaning in a routine, unreflective way.

Knowledge of God stands at the head both of representational and practical knowledge. In the former regard it concerns explicit knowledge of that which we can only come to know personally for ourselves, and not as a matter of quieter, more routine, or casual, habitual or second-hand knowledge. In the latter regard, it concerns practical, tacit knowledge of the kind we can only know by way of entering into lively personal apprenticeship to it as the ground or context from which we apprehend the world, and not as a matter of indwelling more quietly a skill which we have mastered and can call upon and exercise more or less 'at will', with a limited degree of personal attention.

Another way of expressing this is to say that knowledge of God stands at the head both of knowledge of things and properties on the one hand, and of human practice on the other: at the head of nouns and objectives on the one hand, and verbs on the other. In the former regard it concerns that *to* which we attend (from unspecifiable clues) and to which we refer explicitly by name. Now typically such an act of knowing rests upon the prior formation of a theoretical concept. Insofar as this is the case, we can refer to something (say, the characteristic 'red') without need to advert to the skill of doing so (that is, of 'seeing red', which is indeed a skilful integration, as Goldstein's research reminds us), However, in the case of knowing God, that to which we attend can only be known through a distinctive act of lively personal apprehension, in the disposition of unqualified loving intention which is radical responsiveness. We cannot refer to the characteristics of God without being mindful that these are bivocal, that is, to refer to them explicitly is to refer implicitly to *who God is for us*, or what it means for us to apprehend God. Thus in the Bible we find terms such as faith, hope, and love used bivocally of God and of the disposition he evokes in us.

In the latter regard, standing at the head of human practice, knowledge of God concerns that *from* which we attend to the (unspecified) world as such. Now typically the performance which constitutes such practical

knowledge rests upon the prior acquisition of a skill. Insofar as this is the case, we can refer to such performance (say, the act of 'cycling') without need to advert to that which is for us the occasion of this - the rightness of it (that is, the apprehension of what it is right and good to do, to which cycling is a response). However, in the case of knowledge of God our practical knowledge, or wisdom, can only be exercised in the disposition which is unqualified attentive, radical responsiveness. This is no mere autonomous action, but a participation in God's self-disclosing action towards the world.

(f) Knowledge of God through signs
We have seen how our primary, paradigmatic knowledge of God, in radical responsiveness, gives rise to quieter knowledge as the dual disposition of receptivity and critical discernment subsides one way or another. It subsides on the one hand into practical knowledge, which may involve relatively more personal effort (as in the kind of performance we usually call an art) or relatively less (as in the exercise of a largely automatic skill); it subsides on the other hand into representational, theoretical knowledge, which may involve relatively more personal effort (as in the kind of personal insight we associate with wisdom) or relatively less (as in the routine surveying of information).

Such quieter knowledge may now, however, become itself the occasion of encounter with the mystery of God. Here God brings alive our quieter knowledge as a *sign* through which God discloses himself. In the first two chapters of this book we explored the biblical testimony to God's self-revelation through signs, in which God breaks through our familiar, provisional contexts as our ultimate context. From our account of knowledge in this present chapter, we shall now be able to understand better the logic of sign.

Fundamentally, when God reveals himself through signs, our quieter knowledge is re-animated as the occasion of lively, radical responsiveness. Our dual disposition of receptivity and critical discernment is revived in renewed attention to God, and the relation between the subsidiary and focal poles in our *from-to* act of knowing is restored to one of vital inter-animation as we dispose ourselves in a lively personal way, in deep indwelling.

This profoundly affects how we understand God as always reveals himself through signs in creation. We may enlarge upon this as it affects (1) our knowledge of God through signs, and (2) our knowledge of creation as a sign pointing to God.

(1) When God reveals himself through the medium of creation, this does not yield for us knowledge of God which is *less than* direct or primary apprehension of God. Up to a point, it may indeed be true that when we know God through a sign we understand God *in terms of* creation - that we understand God metaphorically or by analogy with persons and actions, things and events within creation. But it is inadequate to think of this as a matter of using familiar concepts beyond their natural range, in a way that matter our knowledge of God

less immediate than our knowledge of creation[34]. It is not the case that we know God by reference to a fundamentally prior act of knowing a specifiable thing *from* which we now happen to attend *to* God - for all that Cartesian habits of imagination would encourage this by insisting that the *from-to* polarity of knowing is reducible in this way. Rather, when we understand God through the medium of his creation, we allow God to renew our understanding of creation in the first place, opening up this provisional context to its ultimate context in God. Our knowledge of God is thus not dependent in a fundamental way upon established concepts, but rather represents a revival of that attention in which we rise to that immediate, first-hand knowledge in which concepts form in the first place. It represents a revival of that radical responsiveness in which the polarity of *from-to* knowing is one of vital inter-animation. And it revives the question of what we are to attend *from* inseparably from the question of what we are to attend *to*, enlarging both our context and that which presents itself to us.

Our knowledge of God, mediated through signs arising in our context in creation, is thus immediate: paradoxically it is a matter, as John Baillie declared, of 'mediated immediacy'.[35]

(2) When God reveals himself through the medium of creation, we are not shown something simply *other than* the creation through which we see him. Rather, as we see God the creator - transcendent over creation - *through* something in creation, we grasp that something in all its fullness precisely as it comes alive as a sign pointing to that which is its own creator and the creator of all. It comes alive for us as the gift that it is, with all the meaning and purpose it fulfils here as a revelation of God, and in so doing points to the mystery of God who gives existence, meaning and purpose to all creation.

This applies to the signs through which God revealed himself in the life of Jesus of Nazareth which we discussed in Chapter One. When Jesus pointed to the approach of God in sovereignty by healing, restoring sight, liberating from demonic possession or social exclusion, he pointed to the full meaning of these acts as gifts reflecting the meaning and purpose of God in creation. When Jesus spoke of God and his ways in the world in terms of life, light, knowledge, etc. he pointed to the full meaning of these things as living mysteries in which God discloses himself.

There are two difficulties which may get in the way of understanding things in such terms. They are related to each other, and arise from cartesian habits of imagination. The first difficulty is that the kind of radical responsiveness in which symbols are alive as signs readily appear to us, not as paradigmatic, lively knowledge which subsides in the mastery of a skill or a concept, but rather as *an ambiguous, transient state*

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[34] We are encouraged to think this way by Cartesian habits of imagination which count the poles of *from-to* knowing specifiable, and so assume a specifiable referent in creation beforehand as that from which we attend to God by way of metaphor or analogy. But this, as we have seen, is to deny the primary irreducibility of the *from-to* character of knowing.

[35] John Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God,* Oxford, 1939, Chapter 16.

of engagement with the world on the way to such knowledge, which comes to full formation in either the performance of skill or a grasp of theoretical knowledge. As such it seen as *not yet amounting to* knowledge. Its ambiguous, transient status may be located in three different ways. (a) lively knowledge may be located in the efforts of an individual to master a particular skill or learn a particular concept. (b) more fundamentally, it may be located in the efforts of the human infant to rise to mastery of skills and concepts *as such*. (c) most fundamentally, it may be located in the evolutionary rise of human consciousness to the point where the voluntary exercise of skills and the formation of concepts are attainable.

There appears no reason to reject in principle the emergence of lively knowledge in each of these locations. What we do have to reject is any assumption that such emergence is to be understood by reference to any supposedly deeper framework of human mastery in which it has a problematic, ambiguous status. Rather any such framework is to be understood by reference to these liminal locations.[36]

The second, related difficulty is that the endeavour of mastering a skill or a concept readily appears to us as a matter of attentiveness towards this skill or concept rather than of radical responsiveness to the world. However, our account of skilful performance and of conceptual knowing has shown how these may both be understood as embedded *ways of seeing the world* into which we enter by way of discovery or apprenticeship, and which are never fundamentally a matter of mastery but of attentive indwelling.[37]

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[36] (a) The fact that lively judgement is no mere transient phenomenon on the way to mastery of a skill is testified especially by forms of practical wisdom. Practical wisdom may be thought of as a skill but this skill is of a kind retaining in them a strong element of learning, at the level of its very meaning. Such, for example, is morally wise judgement. It would mistaken to see such judgement as a transient stage towards the exercise of an eventually mastered routine skill. John Wisdom compares religious experience with both infant attention to the world and with wise, personal, skilful performance in adulthood (see footnote 38).
(b) Donald Winnicott may be right to discern in the infant discovery of 'transitional objects' something which has an affinity with religious experience. It is unwarranted, however, to see such infant engagement with the world as a passing subjective phenomenon on the way to apprehension of the 'real' world. We would do better to recall G. K. Chesterton's claim that in its delight in the world, and infant shares more than adults typically do in God's own delight in creation: 'we have grown old, and our father in heaven is younger than we'.
(c) The relation between lively knowledge and distinctively conscious human life is an issue fundamental for our understanding of the latter. There may be good reason to compare religious experience with the 'mythopoedic' worldview attributed to our human ancestors and reflected in the animism of ancient tribal religions. It would be mistaken, however, to see this as an entirely transient stage towards a worldview in which all knowledge is conceptual, and the world is constituted only of that which can be known conceptually and not in a more lively personal way.

[37] In the case of a skill, we must recall that when we first master a skill, it is not so much that we 'try to master a skill' but that we try to see the world in the way required of us by mastering a skill. It is not that we are not presented with a skill available to us to pick up and use in the world at will, but rather with the challenge, in our situation, rightly to see the world through a performance. Our focal attention is upon the world, not upon a prospective skill. When we learn to cycle, cycling is presented to us as the purpose set before us, the right thing to do, by the world to which we attend; cycling becomes part of our repertoire for doing what is right and good in the world. Accordingly, once we have mastered the skill of cycling, it can later 'come alive' for us as a sign when it enables us to do that which mediates the purposes of God. Of course these occasions extend to simple things like visiting friends or shopping for food, but they also extend to dramatic gestures as when a volunteer fireman or lifeboat man leaps upon his bicycle in response to an emergence call.
Similarly in the case of a concept, we must recall that when we first master a concept, it is not so much that we 'try to master a concept' but that we try to see the world in the way required of us by mastering a concept. It is a matter of learning to see the world rightly, for the gift and responsibility it is. Our focal attention is upon the world, not upon a prospective concept. When we learn to see a 'red' object, our ability to see its redness becomes part of our repertoire for

Beyond Cartesian habits of imagination

We can now understand how cartesian habits of imagination arise, and their nature. Briefly, we may seen them as originating from the experience of conceptual knowledge; they arise when we now form a false conception of such knowing itself, and then apply this indiscriminately to knowing in general. Let us investigate this more closely.

Representational knowledge forms, we have seen, when the question of further radical responsiveness subsides in a particular way. It forms when the question of further receptivity subsides, and receptivity settles into routine indwelling of a determinate concept. Here the mutual interanimation of figure and ground subsides into a settled relation between two distinct, determinate poles, ordered by logical priority. As the question of further receptivity subsides, radical responsiveness subsides into attention to the question of further critical discernment, along with habitual indwelling of the concept which has been formed.

Now, however, in a pivotal step, we may abandon our primary disposition of radical responsiveness, with its dual disposition of receptivity and critical discernment. In its place we may adopt a 'categorical' stance, in which the question of further emergence of meaning is counted *a priori* as not arising. That is to say, the question *whether it arises* is not addressed, but is itself *counted as not arising*. Rather than immersing ourselves in a lively way in the question of further receptivity or critical discernment, we rest unreflectively upon concepts or categories we have come to register in an habitual way, and appraise what presents itself to us entirely by reference to them. Knowledge now takes on the appearance of a skill which we have mastered and can exercise routinely at will, abstracted from the demands of radical responsiveness to the world.

In Cartesian habits of imagination, we adopt such habitual knowledge practically as the default form of knowledge of the world. We tacitly ascribe normative status to such knowledge as defining the vocation of knowledge, the responsibility of knowledge to which we are called by the world. In addition, in precisely the same categorical stance, we imagine to turn to categorical or conceptual knowledge itself, and to look on at it in a second-order way, and so to understand it for what it is. Thus conceptual knowledge is made, both practically and theoretically, the paradigm for all knowing.

This step may appropriately be called **logical inversion**. Whereas conceptual knowledge is about a quiet knowing which is properly understood in the context of lively knowing, cartesian habits of imagination invert this and imagine to understand all knowing by reference to conceptual knowing. This is a fundamental

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seeing and responding well to the world. Accordingly, once we have mastered the concept 'red', it can later come alive for us as the occasion of God's self-disclosure. Again, this may be a simple matter of stopping at a red traffic light, or it may be a matter of responding to the sight of red blood by acting dramatically to help someone.

logical inversion: it is simply logically impossible to understand knowing in this way, with the result that any attempt to do so generates self-contradictions. As we have seen, these take the form of self-concealed self-referential inconsistencies.

Thus it is inadequate to describe sin as a matter of putting man in the place of God. Sin understands neither God or man, to rearrange them in this way. To imagine to replace God with man is at the same time to displace man from himself - you no longer have man, while God has not been displaced.

Thus, in the first instance, from cartesian habits of imagination there form two mutually contradictory ways of seeing the world and our place within it as knowing subjects. The first of these is an assumed knowledge of the world as it is, with no self-awareness of participation in the world through the act of knowing. The second is a focal awareness of concepts, as distinct from the world which is known by reference to and in *a priori* dependence upon them. It is through association with such concepts that we form the further concept of a knowing subject as distinct from the world.

It is this *a priori* reliance upon mastered concepts which, brought to the visual encounter with the phenomena of location and perspective, provides the imagery which nourishes and legitimises cartesian habits of imagination, as follows.

In the cartesian picture of knowing, let us recall, we imagine to look on at the knowing subject and at the world of things to be known side by side. As we do so, we unreflectively place ourselves in detachment outside of the subject's act of knowing and outside of any limitations imposed upon that subject's knowledge by their own location and perspective, while presupposing for ourselves 'direct' knowledge of the knowing subject and the world of things to be known. As a result, the *from-to* character of knowing appears to us derivative upon the prior existence of a knowing subject on the one hand and of a world of things to be known on the other.

However, in reality when we picture things in this way we unreflectively rely, for our assumed direct apprehension of the knowing subject and the world to be known, upon concepts we have mastered. Now this picture is not significantly misleading insofar as the knowing subject and that which is known do indeed lie within our conceptual world. However, in reality they may lay beyond our conceptual world. Moreover, the entire world of things which can be grasped conceptually is limited; to discover the world in a more comprehensive way we must start practically and theoretically from knowledge at its most lively.[38]

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[38] Here we see how the cartesian understanding of what might be called second-order representational knowledge misleads us. According to this, such knowledge is by reference to familiar knowledge of objects and concepts. It simply presupposes first-order knowledge of the existence of meaningful referents; 'indwelling' is of concepts rather than reality. However, this cannot give account of more lively personal knowledge or wisdom. This problem is explained, however, once we recognise that in reality all our knowledge of things in the world is mediated through symbols. Having mastered their meaning, we incorporate them into the new attention we pay to reality. The manner in which we

The visual imagery upon which our picture relies allows, on further reflection, for this enlargement of understanding. In this picture, we attribute to the knowing subject a determinate location and orientation, yielding a perspective upon what is known. Now this picture is not significantly misleading insofar as the viewing subject and that which is viewed do indeed lie within the framework of our own visual 'horizons'. However, in reality they may lie beyond our horizons. That is to say, in order to view them we may have to allow the claims of the knowing subject to revive for us the question of what counts as determinate location and orientation in the first place. We have to allow the dual disposition of receptivity and critical discernment to be revived within us, in order that we may be open to finding new, deeper bearings for ourselves. We have to acknowledge the possibility that, far from stepping back into a wider world to view the knowing subject and the world to be known, we have lapsed from vital attention to these things into an habitual reliance upon familiar concepts. The knowing subject is not located within our horizons, but inhabits a bigger world than us. The challenge we face is to enter into this new world, by *entering into* the viewpoint of the viewing subject in radical responsiveness so as to view what is seen by them. Moreover, the world of what can be seen without doing so - the world of things which can be seen by reference to determinate 'horizons' (which dictate what counts as determinate location and orientation) - is limited; to discover the world in a more comprehensive way we must start practically and theoretically from that kind of radical visual attention which is open to discovering new horizons or bearings in the first place.[39]

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rely upon familiar knowledge as clues is not uncritical but a-critical; we do not rest unawares upon them, but incorporate them in the tacit awareness of attention to the new. The point is a critical one, which is well captured by John Wisdom. He notes:

> 'Sometimes when a child sees something for the first time and we, wishing to help him to understand, tell him what it is, he hardly seems to hear us... The child still silently watches with the intentness of a lover or an enemy only without their preconceptions. Perhaps this is part of why we are told that is we wish to find the truth, we must become as little children. This is all very well, but after all, one who understands was not born yesterday. He is a person with experience and one who sees things in the light of that experience. The trouble is that the concepts, without which we do not connect one thing with another, are apt to become a network which confines our minds. We need to be at once like someone who has seen much and forgotten nothing, and also like one who is seeing everything for the first time. (Wisdom, *Paradox and Discovery*, 1965, p. 137.).

He then recalls a man in Dublin who was renowned for his success in the difficult task breeding lions. Asked the secret of his success, the man replied 'The key is to remember that all lions are different'.

[39] A vivid parable for this is provided by C. S. Lewis in his brief 'Meditation in a Tool-shed' (in Walter Hooper (ed), *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, Eerdmans, 1970. Lewis recounts the experience of standing in a dark tool-shed into which there shines a sunbeam, bright with floating specks of dust. He moves into the beam. Now he no longer sees the dark shed, or the beam itself: he sees the sun, framed by the leaves of a tree and by the crack above the door through which the beam strikes.

Lewis contrasts the experience of looking *at* the beam and looking *along* it. He finds here an analogy for two ways of knowing something. In modern thinking, he says, knowledge is understood exclusively in the former terms. The only authentic knowledge of something is that which we have from outside, not from within. And yet, he points out, there is a self-referential inconsistency here: in any given instance, we can step aside from the act of looking 'at' something and analyse this act itself as an act of looking 'along' - so that it becomes itself an act which we now look 'at', with the effect of suspending its status as knowledge for us. What is needed, says Lewis, is that in any given instance we should be open to both kinds of knowledge. I would of course add that looking 'through' characterises lively, paradigmatic knowing, and looking 'at' is a quieter form of knowing which derives from this, and that when we look 'at' a matter of lively knowledge we do not actually inhabit a wider world at all, but a narrower one.

In summary, if we do not acknowledge and rise to this challenge, we at once inhabit *practically* a smaller world, and we legitimise this *theoretically*. The experience of routine knowledge, *as this is understood imperfectly within such knowledge itself*, is taken as a paradigm for all knowledge. This distorts our understanding of that which in reality cannot be reduced to concepts, but can only be known in lively, radical responsiveness, and distorts our understanding of such lively knowledge itself. And even as an account of conceptual knowledge itself, it is haunted by self-referential inconsistency. This is what happens when our thinking is captive to cartesian habits of imagination. The challenge we face here is to be more receptive to the possibility that the knowledge-claims of another invite us into a larger world than that which we ourselves inhabit conceptually, and to be more self-aware regarding our own habitual ways of thinking, while rising at the same time to that lively critical discernment which is equally constitutive of radical responsiveness.

The logic of evasion and redemption

One distorting effect of cartesian habits of imagination is to conceal the primary place in knowing God of the human will and of love. This is acknowledged in Christian tradition. However, in cartesian habits of imagination matters such as will and love (and indifference and hatred) are seen as a subjective matter, fundamentally distinct from knowledge of those things in the world to which they are directed. Our own account of knowledge as finding its paradigm in radical responsiveness restores will and love to its primary place. It also restored the matter of **sinful evasion** to its primary place as an issue immediately relevant to knowledge and ignorance. As we have noted in earlier chapters, evasion takes two basic forms: it can take the form of a dismissive or submissive, falsely oriented or disoriented personal disposition, a matter personally of false integration or of dis-integration. Can we now give an account of this, as we have of lively and quiet forms of knowing, in terms of the dual disposition of receptivity and critical discernment, and of the *from-to* character of knowing, which are found paradigmatically in radical responsiveness?

We must start, as ever, with such radical responsiveness. The approach of God raises us to radical responsiveness, calling us to give ourselves personally without qualification in a dual disposition of receptivity and critical judgement. Such knowledge of God is paradigmatic for all knowledge. Other, quieter knowledge arises for us as, in the dual disposition of receptivity and critical discernment, on occasion we either find that the question of further receptivity to meaning subsides (with the result that our knowledge settles into conceptual knowledge), or that the question of further critical judgement of meaning subsides (with the result that our knowledge settles into the exercise of a skill we have mastered).

Within this setting, the possibility of evasion arises when the demands of radical responsiveness continue upon us, calling us to lively personal self-disposal in the dual disposition of receptivity and critical discernment. That is to say, neither the question of further receptivity nor the question of further critical

discernment subsides. We may now evade these demands by imagining to set aside the demands *either* of receptivity *or* of further critical discernment towards the world. These represent evasion in its two basic forms. In truth, of course, the demands of receptivity and critical discernment belong inseparably together in radical responsiveness; by abandoning one, we are left in our act of apprehension with only a distorted form of the other. Correspondingly, that which we apprehend is distorted: the 'act of knowing' involved in evasion and 'that which is known' in evasion are characterised by the same distortion.

Let us now consider further the two basic forms taken by evasion, exploring them in relation to the dual disposition of radical responsiveness and the *from-to* structure of knowing. In each case, the distortion represented by evasion takes a different form.

Dismissiveness: On the one hand, faced with the demands of further receptivity and critical discernment, we may push away the question of further receptivity, and rely upon a framework of conceptual meaning already established, exercising critical judgement (without receptivity) towards what presents itself to us, and doing so by reference to this framework (in a way which involves receptivity but no critical discernment). In so doing, we effectively reduce what presents itself to us to a matter of that which can be known theoretically, thereby refusing to allow it to engage us in a lively personal way so as to make personal demands or claims upon us. We reduce it to an object in our familiar world, viewed in detachment. This is an act of false pride and a false claim to mastery, in principle, of the world. In an ultimately arbitrary way, we construct - from that world which we happen ourselves to know - 'the world' itself. Here our receptivity reduces to unreflective allegiance to a world closed to any possibility of mediating the approach of the living God who is in truth the deeper context of our world. For here (although we conceal this from ourselves) we count unfaceable the demands of further receptivity, which allows the renewal of our world and its demands upon us. We refuse these demands by denying their existence. Yet throughout this we are haunted by these demands which we dismiss, with their message that what we imagine utterly to rely upon here in a final way is - as the proper basis for such reliance - an empty illusion. Correspondingly, our viewpoint upon what we dismiss is by no means one of simple detachment; rather it is one of active dissociation.[40]

Disorientation: On the other hand, faced with the demands of further receptivity and critical discernment, we may abandon the effort of critical discernment. Here we let go of the world as we know it and our knowledge of that world, overwhelmed. We experience loss of the world and of ourselves. Of course, the demands we abandon here are not simply those of critical discernment; rather they are the demands of

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[40] By way of illustration, let us picture an old lady who has been intently watching workmen through her net-curtained window, when suddenly one of them turns and waves to her. She remains outwardly impassive, ignoring his wave, and goes on looking at him. However, in reality her situation has altered. She has lost the option of being a passive spectator; having lost it, she chooses actively to dissociate herself from, rather than respond to, the demands of concrete personal address which now confront her. In the same way when the world comes alive as the occasion of God's initiative towards us, we may dissociate ourselves from this. But this is not simply a matter of maintaining a 'detached' position; it is a matter of actively detaching ourselves from the God who addresses us, while denying this to ourselves.

continuing radical responsiveness in which critical discernment and receptivity face us inseparably in a lively way. Correspondingly, our continuing receptivity, stripped of critical discernment, is a distortion of true receptivity. It does not draw us into a renewed world in which we participate in a lively personal way. Here we effective face - in an act of self-contradiction - that which we in the same act count unfaceable, and we are overwhelmed by it. So to speak, we 'take it into ourselves', evading the demands of a renewed effort of integration with which it presents us, we submit to the disintegration of our own existing effort of integration. (incorporating its indeterminacy into ourselves)

In the course of this, our receptivity is distorted into an experience of being captured by, and held bondage to, phantoms which haunt us. In some cases this may take the form of mirages which, as we pursue them, displace themselves away from us; in other cases, it may take the form of spectres which, as we flee them, displace themselves towards us, refusing to be shaken off. In other cases again, what is to the fore is a seemingly passive experience of personal loss, capture and dis-integration. In each case what haunts us has a certain *mocking* character.

The phantoms which haunt us are not entities to which we attend in a normal focal way. Rather than *attract* our attention, they *distract* us, and are known only in the experience of distractedness.[41] Our attention to them is not a matter of responding freely to the real world, but of compulsive or addictive patterns of cognition. This involves a sense of being fated, or of suffering loss, or being mocked - in each case a sense of experiencing something done to us.

In reality, however, their character as phantoms is inseparable from that of the act in which apprehend them. Indeed, in each case, their character is constructed by our own evasion; we are secret accomplices in our own seduction, oppression and loss. Their spell over us is a matter of our own hidden consent. Our own act of engagement is not authentic action; we do not actually pursue or flee that which we register; rather ours is a self-contradictory, paralysed action.

It is in such terms that we may grasp the sinful character of overwhelming. Conversely, sinful behaviour may be understood as fundamentally a matter of evasion, and when this takes the form of disorientation and overwhelming it replaces the real world in all its vitality with a world of distraction and compulsion.

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[41] Goldstein has described such a state as 'failure to centre'. This is the dynamic of ennervating anxiety, guilt and depression, and in general of that experienced loss and brutalisation which diminishes our sense of personal identity and worth. What character has the 'object' of such experience? Goldstein raises this question with regard to the object of anxiety: 'Does the person, in a state of anxiety, become at all conscious of the object? Rather it seems as if, in proportion to the increase of anxiety, objects and contents disappear more and more. He goes on: 'anxiety attacks us from the rear, so to speak. The only thing we can do is attempt to flee without knowing where to go, because we experience it as coming from no particular place.' (Kurt Goldstein, *The Organism*, pp. 292-3).

At the same time, although the phantoms which haunt us in a disoriented state are not entities to which we attend in a normal way, they typically arise *in association with* such entities. Things in our familiar world become the occasion of our capture by such phantoms; they acquire this significance for us. It is important to understand the nature of this association. It is not intrinsic to entities, as in a sacral order. On the other hand, it is not a matter of subjective significance contingently imposed upon certain entities knowable beforehand. This is a misrepresentation which is prompted by cartesian habits of imagination. It is of course the same misrepresentation which these habits of imagination prompt when entities are the occasion of *signs*.

The true starting-point is the demands of radical responsiveness when we are presented by that which can only be known in a lively way, and which presents itself to us as the revival of such knowledge where it has subsided into quieter knowledge of some entity within the world. It is these demands which give rise also to evasion and in particular here to disorientation.

Let us note that this reveals a different relation between signs and the world from the relation between phantoms and the world. In a Christian context, the world of quieter knowledge derives from that of more lively knowledge, and signs be understood as about knowledge of the real in the context of which the real world is known, and disorientation is an evasion of the demands of this, which gives rise to phantoms. We inhabit a dual world of objects and of phantoms. There is only incommensurability between the two.

Here that our attention is drawn to a further aspect of the practical consequences of cartesian habits of imagination. These habits prompt us to interpret the incommensurability between the world of phantoms and the world of objects as corresponding to that between the knowing subject and the world of things to be known. Phantoms are seen as a matter of subjective projection by the irreducible subject or agent on to the world of objects. Not only so, signs are understood in the same way; signs are not differentiated from phantoms, but reduced to them. At this point cartesianism not only misrepresents knowing at its most lively and paradigmatic - and therefore misrepresents all knowing - it actively identifies it with overwhelmed evasion, and this in turn with subjectivity in general. Here we see the full force of cartesianism as itself fundamentally an evasive dismissal of the demands of radical responsiveness both in knowing God and in knowing that it mans to evade God.

The influence of cartesian habits of imagination is evident especially in theoretical reflection upon fields where the focus is precisely upon the subject in lively fields of knowing - religion, morality, art, and personal living. Thus in the ideological worldview in which the ideology of therapy operates, where signs and phantoms are lumped together as subjective 'feelings'. However, it can flip and be overwhelmed. This is the take of certain existentialists and modernists.[42] Here phantoms usurp the free exploration of figure and

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[42] See, for example, the play 'Six Characters in Search of an Author' by Luigi Pirandello. In this play, hailed as the first 'modernist' play, six characters appear onstage asking to be scripted. As the play unfolds, it becomes apparent that these figures do not ask to be incorporated into any wider story set in the real world; rather they each re-enact timelessly their

ground, knowledge and context, destroying story, and becoming a pre-emptive 'context' dictating our perception of everything.

Rather, in order to know things as they are, we have both to turn from proud, dismissive evasion (which ultimately treats all things (including other people, including even God) as objects to be manipulated to one's own ends) and to rise above despairing, disoriented evasion (which is ultimately captive to mirages and spectres created by such evasion), and to know the world for what is as the presence and promise of God, known in the mediated immediacy of an eschatological sign of new creation.

This shed its own light upon what it means to know the redemption which God performed in his self-revelation of Jesus Christ on the cross. God by his grace raises us to stance of radical responsiveness in which we are open to God, and open to reality for what it is, even in the extremity here of his self-concealment and our evasion. Here God addresses in a final way those illusionary worlds which we create either by seeing the world instrumentally and ourselves as the autonomous centre of our world, in proud and ultimately self-deceiving denial and dismissive evasion of God, or else by seeing the world as mocking us with spectres and mirages and ourselves as radically violated. Rather, God approaches us in Christ crucified and risen as the ultimate sign within creation of new creation, to be embraced in our most vital act of radical responsiveness.[43]

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own characterising drama which is their defining reality as persons. The play leaves its audience with the question, is there a real world yielding a narrative within which persons find their identity, or is our life as persons defined rather by reference to timeless, dramatic enactments of personae? In the latter we may recognise, I believe, the worldview of disorientation, dis-integration, capture and paralysis by endlessly self-displacing phantoms.

[43] In an earlier footnote, I illustrated what is involved cognitively in radical responsiveness by reflecting on what is involved in the task of recognising what is rightly to be counted as offering us spatial bearings, thereby defining for us what constitutes determinate location and orientation. I provided visual illustration to help us recognise the limitations of cartesian habits of imagination, and to see that they do not faithfully reflect even visual perception itself insofar as it reaches beyond knowledge of things within an established and familiar set of bearings or horizons, and extends to the recognition of what constitutes proper bearings or horizons in the first place.

The same illustration (that is, what is involved in recognising proper bearings, and determinate location and orientation) can now help us to picture what is involved cognitively in evasion, in terms of the experience of relying upon false bearings and of losing bearings.

Let us imagine that we are sailing coastal waters in calm, misty weather and we try to keep a straight course without reference to navigational equipment. In the far distance, way out to starboard, we make out the shape of a buoy. In the absence of any other bearings we shall feel a tendency to fix our direction by reference to this. But now the mist clears a little, and the sun's disc appears shining faintly through the mist. Now at first sight the sun will appear to move with us, as we continue looking to the buoy for our bearings. It presents an enigma to us. Rather than integrate into the scene around us with the buoy as our point of reference, it haunts us, seeming to be associated with us rather than with the scene through which we quietly move in our boat. In this visual analogy, radical responsiveness is represented by our readiness to reopen the question whether the buoy give us true bearings, and allow a reintegration of the scene in which the sun now takes on the significance of bearings; dismissal is represented by our insistence on relying still upon the buoy for bearings, shutting out consideration of the sun; submission is represented by our becoming fascinated by the sun, while giving up the effort to integrate the sun and our familiar scene. Of course this analogy has the basic limitation that we can perfectly well attend to both the buoy and the sun as objects regardless of whether they have for us the status simply of objects, or of bearings, or of an enigmatic self-displacing image.

Our encounter with God in Christ crucified and risen is a vital re-enactment of that encounter in radical responsiveness from which arises our primary, infant engagement with the world, received as a gift. Here the world we have come to know and inhabit is taken from us in a final way, by the defeat of all meaning. It is the world itself which is immeasurably lost here - and immeasurably regained, in the gift of new creation. Nothing less describes the stature of this event.

Existence: God, ourselves and the world

I have explored, in footnotes to the foregoing text, how cartesian habits of imagination can be brought to light in what we rely upon habitually even for what we count as determinate location and orientation. But there is another matter which may seem even more fundamental than such determinacies: our perception of things as existent as determinate entities. Are cartesian habits of imagination concealed in this perception too? Indeed they are. And the result of these is an inadequate account, in the first instance, of the existence of all that we know in a lively way, in radical responsiveness (starting with God). But it is also, ultimately, an inadequate account even of that which we know as a matter of conceptual knowledge itself, and from which cartesian habits of imagination are mistakenly drawn and given life.

What will it mean to re-conceive existence itself by reference to our lively knowledge of God, in radical responsiveness? Let us explore this briefly now.

Let us begin by recalling the kinds of circumstances in which the question of existence arise explicitly for us. Perhaps most commonly it arises in the form of the question whether we are met with an instance of something of which we have formed a conception and of which we know instances to exist. It also arises more generally in the form of a question whether there are any existent instances whatsoever of something of which we have formed a conception. In each case, the question is about what we conceive as the potential existence of something conceived. It concerns a preconceived object, or action, or event, or situation which may occur or may have occurred. Here the question of existence arises subsequent to what we imagine, in the form of the question whether there is an actual instance of this. Existence denotes instantiation. If no such instance exists, this does not subvert the meaningfulness of the existence we have conceived in the first place.

This understanding of existence (that is, as instantiation of something preconceived), when taken as defining what it means for something to exist, rests upon cartesian habits of imagination. As such it offers a reasonable representation, within certain limits, of existence in the realm of that which is knowable

conceptually. However, it cannot give an adequate account of existence in the realm of more lively knowledge. It cannot even give account of that lively enquiry in which concepts form in the first place as themselves irreducibly an encounter, in radical responsiveness, with that which exists.

Let us start, then, from our most lively encounter in radical responsiveness with that which exists. Here existence concerns that which presents itself to us, which beckons us and addresses us - *noumena*. The term 'exist' derives correspondingly from the latin 'ex-ist', meaning 'to stand out'. This accords with the fundamental *from-to* character of knowing as we have described it: that which exists stands out in the lively interanimation of ground and figure, emerging before us from indeterminacy and non-existence into determinacy and existence.[44]

Let me offer two illustrations of what it means to encounter existence as that which stands out as a presence, rather than as the instantiation of something preconceived. The first concerns encounter with that which is present, the second with the experience of an absence. They are two sides of the same coin.

For my first example, I want to recall what C. S. Lewis writes about the shock of encounter with God. 'Men are reluctant to pass over from the notion of an abstract and negative deity to the living God' he writes. To do so brings a shock comparable he says to 'when the line pulls at your hand, when something breathes beside you in the darkness'. The shock comes, he says,

> 'at the precise moment when the thrill of *life* is communicated to us along the clue we have been following. It is always shocking to meet life where we thought we were alone. "Look out!", we cry, "it's *alive*." (. . .) There comes a moment when people who have been dabbling in religion ("Man's search for God"!) suddenly draw back. Supposing we really found Him? We never meant it to come to *that*! Worse still, supposing he had found us?'[45]

For my second example, I recall an occasion many years ago when I was living in Africa. In the middle of the night, I heard something crash down in the house where I was sleeping. I got out of bed fully expecting to find myself face to face with a machete-wielding burglar. To my huge relief, however, there was no-one

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[44] It is helpful to clarify further the distinctions between existence and non-existence, determinacy and indeterminacy merge. They are not simple contraries. Rather, they arise together ordered by logical priority. That is to say, existence arises in irreducible relation to non-existence, from which it is now differentiated; whereas non-existence connotes that the distinction between existence and non-existence doesn't arise in the first place. Similarly, the determinate arises in irreducible relation to indeterminacy, from which it is now differentiated; whereas indeterminacy connotes that the distinction between the determinate and the indeterminate doesn't arise in the first place. All of this is, of course, is an aspect of the relation between ground and figure as one between the logically antecedent and logically subsequent poles of *from-to* knowing. We also note that this, when properly understood, endorses the Christian doctrine of creation as 'ex nihilo', rather than the classical Greek view of creation as a matter of merely imposing form upon some prior existent but unformed matter.

[45] Lewis, *Miracles,* ch. 11.

there. Rather, the wind blowing through the barred window had caught the curtains up and they in turn have knocked an empty wine bottle over.

How would I describe the perception which brought me such relief? It was a perception of absence, or rather, an absence of perception of anything. I expected to find something, and there was *nothing there*.

Now to our normal way of thinking it would be ridiculous to say I perceived nothing to exist there. The wine bottle, the curtains, the barred window were all there. Nor would it be sufficient to say that what I had expected was not there. Rather, in my perception there was *nothing* there.

Has I expected a person and found, say, a rodent, I would have still have felt something of this 'absence of anything'; and if I had expected precisely a rodent, and found only the effect of the wind, I would again have felt something of this 'absence of anything'.

This issue whether we are confronted 'with anything at all' arises even with regard to inanimate things. To illustrate this, let us reflect upon the following passage written by Michael Polanyi:

> 'At the border between England and Wales you pass a small town called Abergele. Its railway station has a beautifully kept garden in which, sprawling across the lawn, you are faced with the inscription, set out in small white pebbles: "Welcome to Wales by British Railways". No one will fail to recognise this as an orderly pattern, deliberately contrived by a thoughtful station-master. And we could refute anyone who doubted this by computing as follows the odds against the arrangement of the pebbles having come about by mere chance...'

Polanyi then suggests how we might calculate the probability that this pattern has arisen by mere chance. This probability turns out so small that we shall dismiss as a possible explanation of the pattern, that it is a 'chance' occurrence. Polanyi now introduces his main point:

> 'But suppose that some years later, the thoughtful station-master having died, the pebbles became scattered all over the station garden of Abergele, and that on returning to the place we were to seek out the previously eloquent stones and map out on a sheet of paper exactly their present position. Might we not get into serious difficulty if we were now asked once more: what is the chance of the pebbles having arranged themselves in this particular manner by mere accident?'

Following the same method of computation as before we should again find that the probability of this pattern of pebbles having arisen by chance is negligible. And yet, as Polanyi points out, we should not be prepared to - say as we had before, that this had not come about by chance. way is there this difference in our

response? Polanyi's reply is that the act of asking about the probability of a given pattern presupposes that what we have in mind as we do so indeed constitutes a 'pattern' in the first place. Our recognition of orderly pattern comes first; it is this which provides the referent for our questions about probability. The reason why we do not, on the occasion of our second visit to the station garden, raise the question of probability is because this question simply does not arise for us in the absence of any recognisable 'pattern' before us. And this absence can only adequately be described, I propose,

This absence cannot adequately be described as the perception that what I had expected to see was absent, and that I saw something else instead; rather, it is the absence of 'anything there' about which to raise questions such as the question of the probability of its occurrence by chance. And this consideration is not entirely derivative upon any prior knowledge; it extends to occasions when 'the penny drops' and we find ourselves in the presence of something entirely new.

Let me end with two more general reflections concerning what it means to meet and address the question of existence.

Firstly, our encounter with 'existence' reflects the *from-to* character of all knowing, in a particular way which invites further reflection. We have seen that the tacit, '*from*' or subsidiary pole of our knowing can be described as about seeing the world *from* a particular practical skill; it concerns knowing in adverbial mode, if you like. Now correspondingly, whenever we recognise an object *as* an object, in a sense we see the world from it: we identify with it, and *stand with it* attending to the world, as if it shared in some notional way in our own status as a knowing agent and subject of knowledge. Thus when in scientific research we identify something as the material cause of certain events, we have identified with this and invested in it, in some notional way, our own status as the personal, intentional agents of action. However, as we must emphasise, the paradigm for this self-identification with existent objects is found in our encounter with God. And with this comes the reminder that it is God who in the first place identifies with us, in the acts of creation and redemption, and by his grace draws us into his own self-giving self-identification with his creation.

This may be understood paradoxically as at once about creation 'ex nihilo' and about God withdrawing something of the fullness of his own being in the act of creation as *saeculum* or provisional time until the *pleroma*. What it does not permit is any deistic idea of the relation between God and creation, in which God is seen as 'ex machina', likened to a watchmaker who winds up the world and leaves it running according to its own laws and leaving the idea of new creation incomprehensible.

Secondly, and in further regard to existence in its tacit dimension as the subsidiary pole *from* which we view the world, the existence of something in particular is logically antecedent to the concept of (this thing in particular). That is to say, unless something in particular exists, the question simply *does not arise* of what is

this something which presents itself to us. It is not that the question of its existence arises but is to be answered in the negative (although in cartesian thinking, the question regarding the 'that' and the 'what' of existence separate out into two distinct concepts, and concepts can be taken as logically antecedent to existence, now taken merely as instantiation); rather, the question does not arise. This is what it means to say there is 'nothing there', or that we have here not an experience of absence of something but rather the absence of experience of something.

Now here, again, we must affirm that the paradigmatic instance of these things lies our encounter with God. Here, the subsidiary and focal poles of awareness interanimate each other in a most lively way. We know the existence of God precisely as we encounter him for who he is and reveals himself to be. We cannot turn and give our focal attention to the question of God's existence apart from this encounter. Conversely, we cannot grasp God conceptually while bracketing out the question of his existence, for his existence is tacitly addressed and answered in the act of conceiving God.

We might note that there arise interesting questions here for how we are to understand the theory of evolution, its place and its limitations within the context of creation and God's purposes for creation. In his book *God and the New Biology*, (1986), Arthur Peacocke writes of the hierarchy of systems which characterise living organisms. He presents these successive descriptions of life as a 'conceptual hierarchy' which is conceptually irreducible but materially reducible. However, this schema does not adequately capture the distinctiveness of 'life' conceived as a whole and 'evolution' conceived as an historical feature of this whole - marked as this whole is by a succession of 'emergences' each constituting the appearance of a radically *new* whole. It does not adequately differentiate this from the much wider background of the phenomenon of conceptual hierarchy found in e.g. the relation between an animal and its digestive system, cardiovascular system, and central nervous system; or between this and the whole comprised by entire populations of an organism belonging to an ecological system and which subsumes the individual organism as merely part of a greater whole. What the succession of radically new emergences point to is the distinctive phenomenon of that which is irreducibly emergent, or eschatological, and which as such points as a sign to new creation.

Conclusion

This new picture enables us to correct the dichotomies posited between the knower and known, and between commitment and appraisal, by cartesian habits of imagination when these invite us to 'step back' from the world and direct our attention away from the world towards 'second-order' matters. It also liberates from cartesian habits of imagination our understanding of various other key dichotomies which haunt the modern thinking. We turn to some of these in the chapters ahead.

other quotations: on creative arts, not as simply self-expression but faithful depiction: *Many things are wrongly created because the artist does not rightly see.* -Dorothy Sayers-

No man who values originality will ever be original. But try to tell the truth as you see it, try to do any bit of work as well as can be done for the works sake, and what men can originality will come unsought. - C. S. Lewis, 'The Weight of Glory'

see also Cezanne's testimony: