

Selected Themes and Associated Readings from *Personal Knowledge*
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Theme One: The Personal vs. the Subjective

Read PK, [“Preface”](#); [300-303](#); [381](#) (paragraph #1)

- What prevents the personal from being merely a synonym for subjectivity?
- Where, in discovery, is the universal? What has this to do with standards? What has it to do with commitment?
- For Polanyi, what is required in order to recover the world that was lost?

Theme Two: “The Civic Predicament”

Read PK, [203-204](#); [244-245](#)

- What sense of community corresponds to Polanyi’s conception of science? What would the corresponding social and political arrangements look like? (What is a “civic coefficient”?)
- What is Polanyi’s “civic predicament”? (What are its origins?)
- In what sense is even the most liberal of free societies “profoundly conservative”?

Theme Three: Performative Consistency

Read PK, [252-253](#); [256](#) (last full paragraph); [264-268](#); [299](#); [321-324](#)

- Why does Polanyi reveal his “true position as the author”? What is the point of doing so? (Cf. 256.)
- What is “our liberation from objectivism” (267)? What makes it possible?
- Paraphrase the opening paragraph on p. 299.
- Why must Polanyi be consistent? What is the source of the incumbency?
- What is a “calling” for Polanyi? What is *his* calling? (What does he mean [324] by “my belief in commitment is a commitment of the very kind that it authorizes”? What is the higher and what is the path to it?)

Theme Four: “The Second Apple” and the Source of Meaning

Read PK, [268](#); [388-390](#)

- What are the three stages of Polanyi’s grand narrative? What is the “second apple”? Where does *Personal Knowledge* fit it? (Cf. 268.)
- What is Polanyi’s “invitation to dogmatism”? What is his “restoration”?
- What is the source of human significance? (From what does man derive meaning?)

Bonus Questions

- Do truth and beauty exist prior to their realization? (What are the two poles of commitment?)
See p. 389.

- What is Polanyi's response to the allegation that everything that happens today, and in the future (including cultural achievements, etc.), is determined by material conditions in the past? See. P. 390.
- Are you now (as a consequence of reading this book) employing faculties that "centuries of critical thought have taught [us] to distrust" (381)? How so? What difference has this made?