

Vintage Marjorie Grene: A Review Essay on *A Philosophical Testament*

Phil Mullins

ABSTRACT Key Words: Marjorie Grene, Michael Polanyi, person, ecological epistemology
*These reflections summarize major themes in Marjorie Grene's **A Philosophical Testament**. I also highlight Grene's comments on her many years of work with Polanyi and try to draw out some connections between Grene's thought and that of Polanyi.*

Marjorie Grene, *A Philosophical Testament*. Chicago and La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1995. ISBN 0-8126-9287-X (pbk). \$18.95.

Introduction

Grene notes in her 1995 book *A Philosophical Testament* that she at first thought she would title the book “Persons”:

When I first thought of writing this book, in fact, I meant to call it *Persons*. But then it turned out to be about a cluster of other topics, focussed especially on matters related to the problem of knowledge, and bringing in a lot of what professional philosophers call necessary conditions for our ways of knowing, or claiming to know, but not very directly about the concept of the person as such. Still, ‘persons’ is the title I thought of for this concluding chapter. Now I’m not sure why. I’ve rambled on about evolution, and reality, and perception and symboling and heaven knows what (173).

Grene gives here a brief but fair summary of topics covered in her book, written in her mid eighties. Altogether her book is not tightly focused on a philosophical account of the person, it does treat the topic broadly, as she suggests, and insightfully by addressing a number of related topics that have interested her in her long career. This book also reveals a number of things about the person of the author. I found charming and informative what she terms her ramblings but I know that others (see Ward’s discussion in *Appraisal* 1:1[March 1996]: 44-49) have not been so impressed. I suspect that I found *A Philosophical Testament* a very good book for three reasons: First, I know something of the importance Grene played in shaping Michael Polanyi’s philosophical thought and her reflections here shed some further light on these matters. Second, like many others, I have certain indelible memories of Grene’s formidable persona, which comes through even in print. Finally, her philosophical conclusions here are interesting and seem to me to be quite an insightful account of the person worked out within a general framework akin to that of Polanyi. The first two of these matters are worth substantial initial digressions, since they help place Marjorie Grene, and lead to the third matter, the substance of her book.

Polanyi’s Appreciation of Marjorie Grene

Grene’s role in Polanyi’s life and thought is given clear voice in the “Acknowledgements” section of

Personal Knowledge:

This work owes much to Marjorie Grene. The moment we first talked about it in Chicago in 1950 she seemed to have guessed my whole purpose, and ever since she has never ceased to help its pursuit. Setting aside her own work as a philosopher, she has devoted herself for years to the present enquiry. Our discussions have catalysed its progress at every stage and there is hardly a page that has not benefited from her criticism. She has a share in anything I may have achieved here (*PK*, ix).

Further testimony is abundant in the collection of letters (the Polanyi-Grene correspondence) in the archival Polanyi Papers in the University of Chicago's Regenstein Library. For many years, Polanyi clearly relied on Grene to direct him through the twists and turns in the history of Western philosophy and to help him see his own ideas in this context. A 4 September 1960 letter that Polanyi dubbed a "violent appeal" designed to evoke reaction from Grene amply illustrates this. After musing about the bearings of what he termed "two kinds of knowing" on traditional philosophical problems and asking what Grene thought of some books he had recently read by Pieper, Gilson and Langer, Polanyi put his case this way:

All this goes to say: You (Marjorie) are a philosopher, intent on finding out how things stand and you accept the framework of dual knowing; you have all the knowledge of philosophy, past and present that I lack—what is your reason for leaving this enormous body of thought unleavened by the new insights which you share with me?¹

By her own account (188), although she simultaneously worked on many other things, Grene worked with Polanyi from 1950 until the late sixties. It was not merely generous hyperbole when Polanyi pointed out at the beginning of his *magnum opus* "She has a share in anything I may have achieved here" (*PK*, ix). In fact, the correspondence with Grene strongly suggests that she has a share in many of the range of fruitful Polanyi publications in the decade after *PK*, including those Polanyi essays selected for inclusion in the volume Grene edited, *Knowing and Being*.

Grene's Persona

I candidly admit that I remember Grene fondly, although I cannot quite shake the image of her as a volatile brilliance best admired from a distance. In the handful of times I have seen her in person, she was always at once remarkable and somewhat terrifying. As a graduate student, I recall watching her wittily and incisively slice up some of her younger philosopher friends, John Searle, Charles Taylor and Hubert Dreyfus, who dared to push a point she made in a public lecture. I remember once interviewing her in the early seventies about her work with Polanyi. Things went well until I mentioned my interest in theology and that unleashed her tongue. She did not like the fact that Polanyi took an interest in religion and got mixed up with theologians. But then she also had many sharp things to say against professional philosophical inquiry and philosophers. Some gems in fact are in *A Philosophical Testament*:

In my experience, the professionalization of fundamental questions so often leads to triviality, that I hasten to neglect what, as a kind of professional, I suppose (or others suppose) I ought to read (176).

Most philosophers, I have found, live in a philosopher's room, where all apertures have been hermetically sealed against reality and only recent copies of a few fashionable philosophical journals are furnished to the inhabitants (176).

Last but not least, I recall Grene's *tour de force* performance on April 12, 1991 at the Kent State University Polanyi Centennial Conference. I remember wondering if my own knees would shake when I stood up in a full auditorium at Kent State to pose the first question after her excellent paper analyzing the use of "subjective" in *Personal Knowledge* (see *Polanyiana* 2:4/3:1 [1992]: 43-55 or *TAD* 23: 3 [1995-96]: 6-16).

I expect my few personal experiences with Grene are not atypical for encounters with this gruff but passionate and insightful philosopher who had so much influence upon Polanyi. Certainly the pointed prose in *A Philosophical Testament* suggests the volatile brilliance of its author remains intact.

Grene's Philosophical Testament

In her book, Grene points out that she taught at twenty institutions in her career, thirteen years at University of California, Davis being her longest tenure at any one (1). Her extraordinarily brief (about 350 words) biographical sketch in the "Introduction" (she says that the "'story of my life as a philosopher' would be rather dreary"[4]) tells of a life of in and out of academe. It has been a life in which both her strong stands and fiery temperament as well as prejudice against women philosophers were obstacles, a life in which she reports that "most of my time was taken with marriage, family and farming" (5).

A review of Grene's many publications suggests that as a philosopher she might identify herself as a historian of philosophy and a philosopher of biology. While I expect Grene would acknowledge these special interests, she generally describes her philosophic interests as epistemic: "I have got myself entangled with epistemic questions in the context of questions about what persons can do. . ." (4-5). The first three chapters of her book are gathered under the rubric "knowing." Chapter 1 in *A Philosophical Testament* directly treats epistemic questions in terms of "the traditional problem of the relation of knowledge to opinion and of the role of perception in knowledge" (90). Grene argues that the assumed categorical difference between knowledge and belief, running through the Western philosophical tradition since Plato, is problematic: we must correct the presumption that knowledge is necessary and universal and belief is contingent and parochial, and that the two have no connection with one another. As an alternative, Grene argues, we must "look at the knowledge claims we make and see how they are structured if we take them, not as separate from, but as part of, our system of beliefs" (15). Ultimately, here is where she comes out: "Knowledge is justified belief, rooted in perception, and depending for its possibility on the existence in reality itself of ordered kinds of things, including the kind that claims to hold justified beliefs" (26-27). Along the way to this conclusion, Grene discusses both the nature of justification and truth. She articulates a thoroughly historical and bodily account that she links to Polanyi:

We have abandoned the search for knowledge in Plato's sense—a grasp of truth indefeasible and unconnected with our bodily being—and we admit that we are destined to seek, gropingly but not unreasonably, the best clues we can find to the truth about any question that concerns us. Whether it is perception, inference, imagination, or authority that guides us depends both on the kind of question we are asking and on our capacities and our training in the appropriate disciplines or areas of common life. That's the best we can do with the

problem of justification—and it's not too bad. There are philosophers who can help us articulate this general kind of view: Merleau-Ponty or Polanyi, for example(16-17).

For anyone who has read *PK* carefully, there is no question that Grene's opening chapter directly addressing epistemic questions is one sympathetic to Polanyi's positions. One of the more interesting aspects of the chapter and the larger book is to note how much she roots knowledge in perception and how much she links Merleau-Ponty's treatment of perception and Polanyi's discussions:

The artifactual devices we interiorize as we learn our way around a given discipline or acquire a given skill, however theoretical, are themselves alterations of, tinkering with, perceptible, embodied things as much as we ourselves who do all this tinkering are animals finding our way through reliance on our integration of sensory inputs in a perceptible and therefore intelligible habitat. As there is no sharp cut between belief and knowledge, so there is no sharp cut between perception and belief. Perception is both primordial—the most primitive kind of knowledge—and pervasive: the milieu, on our side, within which we develop such information as we can obtain, such beliefs as we can articulate, concerning the places, things and processes among which we live, move and have our being. That is, I think, something like what Merleau-Ponty meant by “the primacy of perception.” It is also the necessary foundation for Polanyi's doctrine of tacit knowing (25).

In Chapter 2, Grene moves on to Kant, a figure about whom she has written much in her career. What she offers are both criticisms of Kant and a clear acknowledgment that Kantian themes still form her starting point for philosophical reflection. As a modern, she gives up Kant's distinction between phenomenal and noumenal: “The distinction between appearances and things in themselves in the radical way Kant made it now seems untenable; there is not such an unbridgeable gap between what appears to us and what there is”(31). She suggests Kant needs a richer sense of the interpretative nature of perception:

Kant seems to have entertained no concept of tacit knowing. We have either simple affection (being affected by . . .), which is not cognitive, or the function of judging, which is. As I have already suggested in my first chapter, that division is unfair to perception, which is already cognitive and, indeed, the foundation of, and model for, all knowledge (35).

In an amusing biographical aside, Grene points out that her life as a farmer reshaped her early reaction to Kant:

Whatever the reason, there it was: agricultural duties and critical philosophy didn't mix. It was like being bereft of one of one's senses. And when I could read Kant again, later on, it was perhaps the immersion in farm life that made my rereading even more radically realistic than it had been when I had come to the Analytic first, as an agriculturally naïve student of philosophy(35).

What ultimately Grene proposes is to transform key Kantian claims:

But what if the T. U. A. [transcendental unity of apperception] were, neither on the one hand a mere fact that . . . , nor on the other a self-knowing, thinking substance such as Descartes claimed to have discovered by the Sixth Meditation, but something more ordinary: a real,

live, breathing, perceiving, exploring *animal*, destined to see, and find, its way in a real, existent, challenging, but up to a point manageable environment? (42).

All in all, however, Grene thinks Kant got many important things right or partially right: “What remains in all this of Kant’s laboriously elaborated argument? Three essentials remain, it seems to me: the active role of the knower in making experience objective, the inexhaustibility of the known, and the indissoluble connection between knower and known” (44).

The final chapter in the first section of *A Philosophical Testament* is “Beyond Empiricism” which offers Grene’s comments on the English philosophical tradition and especially Wittgenstein. It is really only Wittgenstein in whom Grene sees a glimmer of hope. The rest of the English tradition since Hume has been, in one way or another, in her view, locked into subjectivism. Wittgenstein’s turn to language was an effort to get beyond this subjectivism and Grene contends his interest in “family resemblances” really was a move toward appreciation of the inarticulate. But she finds even it too formal:

... we ought to overcome our fascination with purely explicit, formal systems. If thought can deal only with what can be made precise, it can deal with nothing. It is not so much vagueness as the kind of flexibility inherent in the practice of a skill, linguistic or otherwise, that must be acknowledged if we are to make sense of things, or to accept the sense of things (62).

If you think this criticism sounds Polanyian, you are correct; Grene is quite forthright in giving Polanyi his due and she does so in a way that sheds interesting light on both Polanyi and Grene:

Even the most esoteric and theoretical disciplines involve this less than—or more than—explicit ingredient. That is the thesis Michael Polanyi struggled to give voice to both in *Personal Knowledge* and in *The Tacit Dimension* and some of his later essays. It seems paradoxical to try to articulate the significance of the inarticulate, but that is what the concept of tacit knowing was intended to do. And this effort, I think, was convergent with the spirit of Wittgenstein’s family concept, although, admittedly, Polanyi never had the faintest glimmer of such a convergence, nor did I at the time I was working with him. Indeed, he thought all those other people were ‘positivists’, and one couldn’t tell him otherwise. Come to think of it, it was what appeared to me a knock-down refutation of positivism that first appealed to me in Polanyi’s early essays into philosophy (in his Riddell lectures, *Science, Faith and Society*, first published in 1946). And as I have already confessed, during the reign of Wittgenstein I had no idea, either, what the fuss was about (though I did know it wasn’t positivism!) (63).

Grene thinks that Wittgenstein’s interest in “forms of life” was his most important idea: “Indeed some notion akin to the concept of a form of life, or mode of living, needs to be applied to our reflections on human activity in general, to rituals, customs, ways of apprehending reality like science, the arts and so on and on” (63). She comments, however, that “form of life” could have been a productive starting point but she does not think any Wittgensteinians really took off, as they might have, from this notion to develop a philosophy of the person as alive in an environment. In her own words, what Grene has always struggled to articulate is an “ecological epistemology” (26):

It should also be clear by now that both the justified belief formula and the thesis of the primacy of perception must be understood in a realistic sense. We dwell in human worlds, in cultures, but every such world is itself located in, and constitutes, a unique transformation of, some segment of the natural world, which provides the materials for, and sets the limits to, its constructs (26).

Or as she later puts the matter, in terms of a focus upon the living biological and social person: “To be alive, however, is to be somewhere, responding somehow to an environment, and in turn shaping that environment by our way of coping with it. To study human practices, including language, as forms of life is to study them as activities of the particular sort of animal we find ourselves to be” (63-64).

The second unit of Grene’s book shifts from “knowing” to “being” and the first of three chapters in this section compares “being-in-the-world” in Heidegger, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, all figures she has written about previously. Grene is, on the whole, discouraged by Heidegger and Sartre’s discussions, but she argues that Merleau-Ponty provides a brilliant account of perception and bodiliness that she claims is a parallel to Polanyi’s discussions.

In the course of her discussion of Heidegger, some interesting historical details about Grene’s own career are relevant. After finishing an undergraduate degree in zoology in 1931, she went to Freiburg as an exchange student and attended Heidegger’s lectures; the next year, she was at Heidelberg studying with Jaspers. After returning home in 1933, Grene took an M.A. and a Ph. D. in philosophy at Radcliffe, but returned to Denmark in 1935-36 to study Kierkegaard when she could not get a job.

I had written a hasty and atrocious dissertation on *Existenzphilosophie*, in order to get out quickly and get a job, but for women in those days, and especially in the depression, there were none. Indeed, when I had passed my final orals for the doctorate I was told: Goodbye; you’re a bright girl but nobody gives jobs to women in philosophy.’ It seemed reasonable then, for the moment, to go on, or back, to Kierkegaard, though I had little if any sympathy for that particular gloomy Dane (5).

A year later, she managed to get a teaching assistant position at the University of Chicago in order to participate in Carnap’s research seminar. Eventually, she became an instructor at Chicago and taught there until, as she bluntly puts it, “MacKeon had me fired in 1944” (5). It is at this point that Grene’s years on the fringes of academic philosophy, as a busy farmer and mother, first in Illinois and then, in 1952, in Ireland, begin. Grene’s firsthand experience with Heidegger led eventually to her writing about Heidegger. She admits that when she studied in Germany, she was taken with Heidegger but that quickly changed:

By 1934, . . . I was thoroughly disillusioned with all these ‘deep meanings’. It was out of necessity—or sheer historical contingency, which is a kind of necessity—that I returned to Heidegger’s work and to literature in some ways akin to it, in other words, to what is called continental as distinct from analytical philosophy. Since I had studied with Heidegger, and the following year with Jaspers, I was asked to write about these people when they came into vogue among us after the war. And since I had lost my job and was tied down by farm and family so that I couldn’t wander off looking for another position, I thought I should do

whatever I was asked to do that was in any way philosophical, in order not to get lost altogether from any contact with my profession. Every time I wrote about the stuff, I said, 'Ugh, never again' (68-69).

About Heidegger and his discussion of being-in-the-world, Grene offers a little praise, but not very much: Heidegger's discussion, Grene sees, as making a "move against the *cogito* as the starting point of philosophy" (71) and he appropriately stresses the pervasiveness of the hermeneutic circle (73) but Heidegger is a contorted "jungle of noologisms"(71). Worse than the arbitrary and unintelligible style is the fact that Heidegger's human being "is as disembodied as any Cartesian mind could be" (77) and the fact that there is a "deep connection between that account and Heidegger's undoubted Nazism or fanatical German nationalism. . ." (77-78). It is true, I suppose, that she is somewhat more sympathetic to the early than the late Heidegger whose writing she simply dubs "appalling nonsense" (69)! Grene is only a little less harsh with Sartre's ideas about being-in-the-world and, more generally, with *Being and Nothingness*: "Like Hume's *Treatise*, it is one of the transcendent works of our philosophical tradition which show how, given inadequate premises, a particular movement of thought works itself into an impassable dead end"(79). But, as I have noted above, Grene thinks Merleau-Ponty is an enormously important thinker who, like Polanyi, tries to redirect the philosophical tradition. She did not study Merleau-Ponty until 1960-61, after she had been working with Polanyi on *Personal Knowledge* (1958), but when she did read *The Phenomenology of Perception* what she found was a companion piece to *Personal Knowledge*: ". . . Merleau-Ponty's book seemed to me to convey the same message, but in the opposite order, and in a language that I could both understand and use (or so it seemed at the time)" (69).

Grene's several page discussion of Merleau-Ponty's approach (she approves but does not want to call it "phenomenology" since she finds that movement is thoroughly unrealistic) and conclusions are very insightful. I found it of interest that she links Merleau-Ponty not only to Polanyi but also to Erwin Strauss, Kurt Goldstein and Helmuth Plessner's philosophical anthropology, All of these figures she identifies as reformulating philosophical problems on a post-Cartesian basis. Most of these figures (plus a few others) are also mentioned in Grene's correspondence with Polanyi in the early sixties (see Grene's letter of 19 January, 1963 in Box 16, Folder 1). In 1963, Grene advised Polanyi that she had a hunch that there is a "literature of a new theoretical biology-cum-animal psychology, which is consistent with and supports your epistemology," but that this literature lacked some basic Polanyian philosophical distinctions and has not "(1) incorporated epistemology into the new biology or (2) founded the new biology on an epistemology adequate to it, let alone; (3) generalized both the former to a comprehensive ontology. I don't think you have yet finished doing either. So please get on with it!!!" (Grene letter to Polanyi, 19 January, 1963, Box 16, Folder 1).

Polanyi apparently read Merleau-Ponty, possibly at Grene's suggestion, for references to his work begin to appear in Polanyi's writings in the early sixties. The new introduction (dated December, 1963), "Background and Prospect," to the University of Chicago reprint of *Science, Faith and Society* identifies *Phenomenology of Perception* as a book that analyzes "perceived knowledge on the lines of Husserl" and "arrives at views akin to these I have expressed here" (*SFS*, 12). The most extensive comment about Merleau-Ponty is in Polanyi's "The Structure of Consciousness" (first published in 1965, but also included in *Knowing and Being*, 221-223). But Merleau-Ponty (along with Husserl who Grene despises) is also mentioned approvingly in "The Logic of Tacit Inference" (first published in 1966, but also included in *Knowing and Being*, 55-56). *The Phenomenology of Perception* and some other Merleau-Ponty essays, Grene says in *A Philosophical Testament*, provide ". . . the most effective account so far of what it is to be in a world: to be a person living his (her) life in

the odd fashion vouchsafed us by the contingencies of global, biological and human history” (80).

Grene’s fifth chapter “Darwinian Nature” shifts from “being-in-the-world” to biological being. This chapter, her most dense, is what she calls “a very crude and overabstract run at what we might mean by ‘Darwinian nature’ as our habitat” (106). In the course of her discussion in this chapter, it becomes clear how Grene came to work in philosophy and biology. Grene came back to the study of biology and thinking about evolution twenty years after she was an undergraduate because, in 1950, she met Michael Polanyi and found a congenial spirit:

Michael Polanyi, a distinguished physical chemist turned philosopher, had come to lecture at the University of Chicago and though I was marooned on the farm I managed to hear one of his lectures. As I remarked earlier, I found his argument against positivism thoroughly convincing; in fact I thought he had found the very refutation of that movement that I had been unable to articulate twelve years earlier in Carnap’s seminar. So when he asked me to help him with the preparation of his Gifford lectures—the work that would be published in 1958 as *Personal Knowledge*—I was delighted to do so. It seemed to me that if I had any talent for philosophy, the best I could do with it in my isolated situation would be to help Polanyi in his struggle, as he called it then, “to articulate the inarticulate.” I remember his telling me this as we walked a bare eroded field . . . on our Cook County farm. One of the jobs he set me soon thereafter was to look up heresies in evolutionary theory, specifically critics of the evolutionary synthesis, which was then, if one takes the centennial year of 1959 as its apotheosis, in its chief period of flowering. And once I started reading that literature I was unable to stop (91).

Grene says Polanyi, even though a physical chemist, “wanted to look at the processes of science as efforts of living creatures to achieve, as he put it, ‘contact with reality’ ” (92). She found an interesting tension between this approach and Aristotle’s deductive approach to science and this sparked her interest in Aristotle’s biology. Meanwhile, she notes that in reading the evolution literature, she learned “some lessons about Darwinism” (92) She came to believe “a balance of structure and alternation are needed to produce any episode in evolution, much less the sweep of the whole history of life on earth” (94).. The emphasis upon form has sometimes been almost totally repressed by the Darwinian emphasis upon change. Grene provides a long and detailed discussion of the role of chance in Darwinian nature. She emphasizes the importance of mutation or chance variation in evolution (since something must be heritable) and she points out parallels between modern biology discussions and responses to chance in the ancient philosophical tradition. Repeatedly, Grene emphasizes that her philosophical thinking has steadfastly sought to place humans in an evolving nature. Her probing of biology has always aimed to discern what difference biology makes in what can be said about human capacities. For Grene, philosophical questions about the nature of freedom emerge from within the Darwinian frame: “. . . it does appear that different organisms differ in the extent to which they can learn from experience. And it is that space for learning, and, where there are traditions, like ours of speaking our strange languages. . . it is that space for learning or tradition that sets the stage for freedom” (99).

She also works out ways to emphasize responsibility within the context of her steadfastly naturalistic (but not reductionistic) vision: “. . . a human being is a biological individual capable of becoming a responsible person thorough participation in (or as one unique expression of) a culture” (107). She argues that human knowledge is fundamentally orientational, since in essence it is concerned with knowing one’s way about in

the world. And she believes “the most significant epistemological consequence of an evolutionary metaphysic” is “an unwavering and unrepentant realism”(110).

All in all, “Darwinian Nature” is an interesting chapter that makes clear how Grene’s study of biology has refined her philosophical commitments, and particularly her commitments about persons. For those who know of Grene’s irritation with Polanyi (and Polanyians) for his positive comments about religion, this parting note on religion at the end of her discussion of nature is striking:

Admittedly, once we find ourselves as natural beings at home in a Darwinian nature, fundamentalist Christianity or any other literal and dogmatic belief in a Transcendent, All-Powerful Maker and Lawgiver with a Mind somehow analogous to ours (or to which ours is somehow analogous) must wither away. But are willful ignorance and superstition identical to reverence and the impulse to worship something greater than ourselves? There is grandeur in this view of life, Darwin wrote at the close of the *Origin*. Again, perhaps this was only meant to placate his readers as well as his wife; but I doubt it. A sense of the vastness and the vast variety of nature must have impelled the work of natural historians like Darwin and still drives the efforts of many working biologists in many different fields. Such an attitude is not wholly alien, I should think, to religiosity at its best. Given the manifold self-delusions and fanaticisms supported by organized religions, I am no longer sure the game is worth the candle, but at least one can deny the crude Provinian thesis: Darwin in, religion out. It ain’t necessarily so, though at this juncture I wouldn’t like to say what is so in this context. By now, the Philo of Hume’s *Dialogues* seems to me the safest guide in the philosophy of religion (111-112).

The last chapter in the unit of *A Philosophical Testament* on “being” is Grene’s discussion of realism which she titles, borrowing a note from Merleau-Ponty, “The Primacy of the Real.” Several of the quotations above make clear that Grene finds it important to affirm realism, but this chapter clarifies exactly what sort of realist she is. She acknowledges that she once called herself a “comprehensive realist” (114) but has given up this terminology because it is ambiguous. The shape of Grene’s realism is, of course, contoured by her steadfast focus on humans as living creatures embedded in an environment:

Things and events impinge on us one way or another through our senses, and that includes, of course, cerebral mediation of incoming information as well as our social-linguistic reading of it. From the beginning—even prenatally, it now appears—human individuals constantly, or recurrently, notice and interpret impacts from things and events both outside and inside their own bodies (115).

She defines her realist position as built on two theses: human beings exist within a real world and are surrounded by it and shaped by it and human beings are real. These fundamental affirmations she says are essentially an effort to get beyond the subject-object split and the split between in-here and out-there which “makes nonsense of a world that is living, complicated, messy as you like, but real. I am myself one instantiation of that world’s character, one expression of it, able also, in an infinitesimal way, to shape and alter it” (114).

Grene organizes much of her discussion in this chapter as a critique of philosopher of science Arthur Fine’s attack upon realism. She argues that Fine and many other philosophers of science often presuppose too

narrow a notion of knowledge as explicitness. She regards much of philosophy's discussion about realism as an in-house debate about "scientific realism." Much of this debate is misguided because of formalistic suppositions about knowledge. Something like Polanyi's from-to account of knowledge is needed, Grene contends. The debate in philosophy also goes awry because of philosophy's long-standing erroneous ideas about perception. This goes back to the early empiricists and Grene has a whole later chapter on perception, which articulates what she sees as an alternative to the philosophical tradition's views. She also says that social anthropology can be helpful for restoring a richer realism focused around living beings.

The final unit of Grene's book includes three chapters that she locates under the rubric "coping." These chapters are about "how we manage. As natural beings made what, or who, we are by the givens of a culture, how does each of us, as a responsible person cope with the world around us, including, of course, our peers of the human world?" (173). The opening chapter in this unit is "Perception Reclaimed: The Lessons of the Ecological Approach." Here Grene focuses on explicating the ideas about perception of J.J. and Eleanor Gibson whose ecological approach she sees as complementing Merleau- Ponty's account of the primacy of perception. Grene contrasts the Gibsons' account with what she regards as the standard account that is rooted in empiricist philosophy's view of perception way back in Locke, Berkeley and Hume:

. . . experience does not appear to be constructed out of little bits, whether pleasures, pains or bits of this-hue (or taste or smell or sound)-exactly-here-exactly now. Berkeley, and Hume after him, did honestly believe, it seems, that experience is built up of such little mental atoms, and their belief has lingered in later theories of perception, both in philosophy and psychology. Yet surely it is arbitrary and unnecessary to dissect experience in this abstract way (134).

According to Grene, the Gibsons don't make a strong distinction between sensation and perception and this leads them to take a more relational and biological approach. They think of perception not in terms of sense data and cognized images but in terms of particular organisms in particular environments. Grene argues that perceptual systems have developed through evolution as systems that worked effectively to pick up information essential to the lives of the animals in question. Grene likes the Gibsons' views because they stress "the exploratory activity of the perceiver" and show "the primary perceptual process is already cognitive—and I think one could argue further that all cognition is, in the last analysis, at least in part perceptual" (141).

Where Grene takes this ecological approach to perception ultimately links up nature and culture in the human world:

. . . as human reality is one version of animal reality, so human knowledge is one species-specific version of the ways that animals possess to find their way around their environments. Granted, our modes of orientation in our surroundings are peculiarly dependent on the artefacts of culture. Culture mediates between ourselves and nature, and given the multiplicity of cultures, we appear, so far as we can tell, to possess, or to be able to acquire, a very much greater variety of paths of access to reality than can members of other species. Now culture, and the artefacts of culture, are of course of our own making and in the last analysis we accept their authority only on our own recognizances. But culture, rather than being a mere addendum to nature, a fiction supervenient on the naturally induced fictions of perception—culture, on our reading, while expressing a need inherent in our nature, is itself

a part of nature (144).

Greene's eighth chapter is a foray into philosophical anthropology; here, making heavy use of figures like Peter Wilson (*The Promising Primate*), she sets forth her basic ideas about "coping" through human use of symbols (which, after Wilson, she terms "symboling"). Through language, the products of language and ritual, human groups set forth and enforce a particular system of symbols and symbolic behavior which makes a group distinct. As symbol users, we are the creatures who promise; we pledge in the present to certain behaviors in the future. Symbols allow humans to take on social roles and create social spaces and, in turn, to be shaped by them:

Other animals of course have 'houses' and territories; other animals of course assume various social roles. Ants, for example, build whole cities, and act as foragers, guardians or garbage collectors, as the case may be. But we systematically construct such places and such roles, and are constructed by them, through the activities of symboling that make our particular society—and thereby our particular selves—the societies and the selves that they historically proclaim themselves to be (164).

The human lifestyle is distinguished from the life forms of other kinds of organisms in that it must be characterized in terms of "systematic self-creation" (165). Greene comments upon pluralism and relativism at the end of her discussion. She admits that she finds it "unlikely that there is one great system of standards adherence to which defines humanity" (167). But Greene thinks that Polanyi's ideas about commitment rescue one from the horns of the dilemma occupied by skepticism and absolute dogmatism. She claims that her position (and that of Polanyi) is different than "careless relativism" (168):

And the difference is that we know that we hold our beliefs, as indeed, the Azande do theirs, responsibly and with universal intent. Given such self-knowledge, further, we can school ourselves to approach other cultures with understanding while recognizing our own allegiance to our own. From within our own system of ritual, myth, and language we can describe and appraise the practices of others. Indeed, it is one of the characteristics of our particular tradition that, within limits, we are able to do this—as well as to appraise and amend some features of tradition in which we ourselves were reared. It is our own self-constitution as a society—or a sub-society—capable of criticizing and amending our own fundamental beliefs that makes possible the development of disciplines like anthropology or history. Literary genres like the novel or any major style in painting or sculpture also depend, I should think, on the same capacity for self-distancing—but always from within the nexus of standards or beliefs to which, as members of this society, we stand committed (168-69).

Put in another way, what Greene is pointing to is the paradox of self-set standards as she acknowledges:

We enter into obligations which compel us—not biologically or physically, but personally and morally—to act as we do. The intellectual passions that drive the life of science, the aspirations that compel the artist to paint or write or carve or build or compose: all these strivings express commitments, obligations to fulfil demands made on us by something that both defines and transcends our particular selves. . . . the point is to recognize what Polanyi called the paradox of self-set standards. We accept with universal intent principles or patterns

of behavior that we have at one and the same time both happened to develop and enacted as responsibly our own (169-170).

Greene's last chapter, "On Our Own Recognizances" tries to "face the question, how each of us responsibly takes up the burden of shaping those natural and cultural parameters into a particular life history" (174). She emphasizes the choices that persons make as a center of action: "To be a person, in the sense in which we human beings consider ourselves persons, is to be the center of actions, in such a way that we are accountable for what we do. Even if we are not accountable, as Augustine was, to God, or, as every actor is in a public context, to the law, we are accountable to ourselves." (176).

But Greene is careful not to overdraw the sense in which choices are perceived as ambiguous, weighty and wholly resting in our hands: "... just recognizing the compelling character of our most significant decisions leads me to question the adequacy of the 'could have done otherwise' formula to capture the peculiarity of human agency or action" (178). What she is searching for is a way to speak about human choice in terms of transcending (but certainly not Transcendent) ends:

... I want to avoid the inward turn of reading agency, or responsible personhood, in terms of consciousness, or, to cite Wittgenstein again, in terms of "secret inner somethings". What I want to stress even in the individual is not anything inward, but something like an ordering principle, a center of responsibility to principles, or ends, or causes, something beyond myself to which I owe allegiance (178).

Greene argues that a sense of obligation is fundamental not only to ethical decision making but to the quest for knowledge and this seems to be central to being a person in the strong sense of that term:

I do want to accept from Kant the notion of obligation, or, in Polanyi's terms, of commitment, as a necessary, and even central, ingredient of our existence as persons. To act freely, as a responsible center of decision and performance, is in some sense to give oneself, of one's own accord, to some principle or task or standard that obliges one's obedience or one's assent (181).

Her effort to sort out exactly what constitutes a person turns, in the end, to her own person. Surely this last note in her book, if not the whole book, is vintage Greene:

When I am asked what my speciality is in philosophy, I stammer and say, 'Oh, well, this and that.' I admitted earlier that while I was semi-, or better, about ninety percent detached from my profession, I did a lot of jobs I was asked to do because I thought that if I refused any offers with any professional respectability I would disappear altogether. But I think I also suffer from a tendency to run at this and that and fail to stick with it. Self-knowledge is difficult; I don't know. It's also boring; I don't much care. For the moment, at any rate, this is the best I can do at seeing, or saying, how the question, what it is to be a person, was involved in such work as I have been doing over the years, and decades" (188).

As I suggested at the beginning of this review, *A Philosophical Testament* is not a conventional philosophy book with a concise, tightly woven argument. It is a wonderful wandering through her life's work

as Marjorie Grene sought to clarify her own convictions about what a person is. Perhaps this effort comes close to Polanyi's definition of philosophical reflection in *Personal Knowledge*:

I believe that the function of philosophic reflection consists in bringing to light, and affirming as my own, the beliefs implied in such of my thoughts and practices as I believe to be valid; that I must aim at discovering what I truly believe in and at formulating the convictions which I find myself holding; that I must conquer my self-doubt, so as to retain a firm hold on this programme of self-identification (*PK* , 267).

Notes

¹ Polanyi letter to Grene 4 September 1960 Box 16, Folder 1 Papers of Michael Polanyi, University of Chicago Library. Quoted with permission of the University of Chicago Library, Department of Special Collections. Future citations to this archival material will be in parentheses by box and folder number.

WWW Polanyi Resources

The Polanyi Society has a World Wide Website at <http://www.mwsc.edu/~polanyi/>. In addition to information about Polanyi Society membership and meetings, the site contains the following: (1) the history of Polanyi Society publications, including a listing of issues by date and volume and a table of contents for most issues of *Tradition and Discovery*; (2) a comprehensive listing of *Tradition and Discovery* authors, reviews and reviewers; (3) information on locating early publications; (4) information on *Appraisal* and *Polanyiana*, two sister journals with special interest in Polanyi's thought; (5) the "Guide to the Papers of Michael Polanyi" which provides an orientation to archival material housed in the Department of Special Collections of the University of Chicago Library; (6) photographs of Michael Polanyi; (7) the call for papers, programs and papers for upcoming (or recently completed) meetings, and (8) selected short writings of Michael Polanyi

Submissions for Publication

Articles, meeting notices and notes likely to be of interest to persons interested in the thought of Michael Polanyi are welcomed. Review suggestions and book reviews should be sent to Walter Gulick (see addresses listed below). Manuscripts, notices and notes should be sent to Phil Mullins. Manuscripts should be double-spaced type with notes at the end; writers are encouraged to employ simple citations within the text when possible. MLA or APA style are preferred. Abbreviate frequently cited book titles, particularly books by Polanyi (e.g., *Personal Knowledge* becomes *PK*). Punctuation and spelling may follow either British or American standard practices. Shorter articles (10-15 pages) are preferred, although longer manuscripts (20-24 pages) will be considered.

Manuscripts normally will be sent out for blind review. Authors are expected to provide a hard copy and a disk or an electronic copy as an e-mail attachment. Be sure that electronic materials include all relevant information which may help converting files. Persons with questions or problems associated with producing an electronic copy of manuscripts should phone or write Phil Mullins (816-271-4386). Insofar as possible, *TAD* is willing to work with authors who have special problems producing electronic materials.

Phil Mullins
Missouri Western State College
St. Joseph, Missouri 64507
Fax (816) 271-5680
Phone: (816)271-4386
E-mail: mullins.mwsc.edu

Walter Gulick
Montana State University, Billings
Billings, Montana 59101
Fax (406) 657-2187
Phone: (406) 657-2904
E-mail: wgulick@msu-b.edu

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