

# Michael Polanyi and Karl Mannheim

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*This essay reviews historical records that set forth the discussions and interaction of Michael Polanyi and Karl Mannheim from 1944 until Mannheim’s death early in 1947. The letters describe Polanyi’s effort to assemble a book to be published in a series edited by Manneheim. They also reveal the different perspectives these thinkers took about freedom and the historical context of ideas. Records of J.H. Oldham’s discussion group “the Moot” suggest that these and other differences in philosophy were debated in meetings of “the Moot” attended by Polanyi and Mannheim in 1944.*

Anyone who examines the *Guide to the Papers of Michael Polanyi* quickly notices that Polanyi corresponded with a wide range of people in his generation who later were recognized as significant thinkers in the twentieth century. One of these figures was Karl Mannheim (1893-1947) to whom Polanyi not only wrote but also met on several occasions. Like Polanyi, Mannheim was a Hungarian Jewish émigré who eventually came to live in England. Both men left their homeland just after World War I when the Horthy government came to power. Mannheim had been appointed to a professorship by the communist government of Bela Kun that fell before the end of its first year.

Polanyi and Mannheim had known each other in Hungary. In their newly published biography of Polanyi, Scott and Moleski suggest that Polanyi and Mannheim first met when they were students in Budapest in 1915.<sup>1</sup> Mannheim is but two years younger than Polanyi and both participated in the Sunday afternoon discussions at the home of Bela Balazs.<sup>2</sup> When he fled Hungary, Mannheim moved to Germany where he spent twelve years working in German universities and eventually achieved a measure of eminence as a sociologist of knowledge; his *Ideologie und Utopie* (1929) caused a “great commotion” in Germany, according to Edward Shils.<sup>3</sup> As a sociologist of knowledge, Mannheim argued that knowledge claims must be situated in a social context; in any social world, there is always tension between conservative forces whose ideology favors stability and more radical forces whose ideology favors more utopian ideas. In 1933, the same year Polanyi came to Manchester, Mannheim left Nazi Germany for a position in London.

In 1944, Polanyi and Mannheim became reacquainted. Éva Gábor has recently published, as part of her book of selected correspondence of Mannheim, the Polanyi and Mannheim letters running from January of 1944 until September of 1945.<sup>4</sup> All twelve letters in the Gábor collection are from the archival collection of Polanyi materials at the University of Chicago. They tell an interesting story, one that in fact decidedly hints at the contours of Polanyi’s emerging philosophical ideas and one that points out differences between Polanyi’s views and those developed by Mannheim. These letters are particularly revealing if they are linked to some other archival materials (including a few additional letters) that treat the interaction of Polanyi and Mannheim. Both were figures who participated in the discussion group called “the Moot” led by J. H. Oldham. Looking back at this time, Polanyi, in the 1960s, remarked to Richard Gelwick that his involvement in Oldham’s discussion groups (“the Moot” and successor groups) was an influence upon his ideas second only to his work as a research scientist.<sup>5</sup> The Scott and Moleski biography of Polanyi briefly discusses both Polanyi’s friendship with Mannheim and Polanyi’s involvement in “the Moot.” However the Polanyi-Mannheim correspondence

and its connections with two particular Moot meetings is rich enough to warrant a more detailed exploration which is what we undertake here.

## **I. The Initial Book Proposal**

Polanyi and Mannheim's friendship in England began in January of 1944 when Polanyi sent Mannheim a book proposal.<sup>6</sup> Mannheim was by this time the editor of Routledge and Kegan Paul's series titled "The International Library of Sociology and Social Reconstruction." Polanyi's first letter to Mannheim was a very business-like outline for a volume in Mannheim's series, but he indicated that he already had been sending occasional reprints of his writings to Mannheim for a few years. These reprints, he said, show "that I am taking an active interest in the general problems of our time" (No. 240). Mannheim's reply to Polanyi's letter suggested that he "was always very much interested in your essays and I am looking forward to their reading in the new setting."<sup>7</sup> Polanyi's book proposal outlined a plan to knit together revised versions of five recent essays with another chapter summarizing their themes; the five were "Science—Its Reality and Freedom"<sup>8</sup>, "The Autonomy of Science"<sup>9</sup>, "The Growth of Thought in Society"<sup>10</sup>, "The English and the Continent"<sup>11</sup>, and "Jewish Problems."<sup>12</sup> Mannheim's prompt response to Polanyi's letter was a cordial offer to read (or perhaps re-read) the material, looking at it in terms of its suitability to compose a book; he asked that Polanyi draft a "brief statement which would somehow explain the unity of this book. I shall want this in case my Board of Publishers should raise the problem either of the coherence of the topics or of the sociological aspect of their treatment" (No. 241).

Two weeks later, Polanyi sent to Mannheim all of the essays that he intended to pull together in his book. In the accompanying letter, he apologized for not yet writing "the outline of the sixth paper," noting that he recognized Mannheim could not adequately judge the material without this. Nevertheless, he proposed that Mannheim go through the essays "as a matter of friendly interest." Polanyi explained that his failure to provide an outline of the sixth essay was due to "my intense preoccupation with a book on 'Unemployment, Laissez Faire and Planning.'<sup>13</sup> He hoped to finish the draft of this book by the end of the month and did not wish to interrupt his work with anything that could wait. Later in this letter, in a very cordial manner, Polanyi proposed that he and Mannheim meet for a discussion when he came to London sometime after Easter:

I feel very much the loss of never meeting you. The more so perhaps, because our views are, I think, in closer harmony now than they were at earlier times. My throat trouble may prevent me from using my voice for another month or so, but I hope to be free from it by Easter, when I propose to spend a few weeks in London. I shall try to arrange a meeting with you and your wife on that occasion (No. 242).

## **II. The Visit and Polanyi's Subsequent Letter**

This visit to Mannheim's home apparently occurred in early April of 1944 since Polanyi wrote Mannheim a follow-up letter after the visit. The letter of April 19 reported that Polanyi enjoyed the visit "intensely"<sup>14</sup> but this letter is more than one offering polite thanks. This is a long letter that seeks to clear up some things which seem to have been left pending in the visit. Scott and Moleski(194-195) have quoted this letter at length because this is one of the rare Polanyi documents in which Polanyi discusses his personal religious convictions as well as his very early response to the Hungarian Marxist government. Polanyi reported

on the waxing and waning of his interest in Christianity from his twenties to his present age, 53, and on his early dissent against the communist government in Hungary after World War I. While certainly Polanyi's religious pilgrimage is of interest, what is of equal interest and importance are some of the things that Polanyi says about his ideas about economics and political philosophy. These are worth reviewing in some depth.

Early in this letter, Polanyi credits his new life as a British citizen as providing him with a true understanding of civic liberty:

It is true that I had no conception of the true nature of civic liberty before coming to this country in 1933. But I never had supported in any form and on any occasion the rule of a power which was contrary to civic liberty. I needed no conversion to this ideal but merely instruction in it, on grounds prepared for its reception (No. 244).

Polanyi also sets forth his sympathy for Keynesian economic ideas, linking Keynes with his own recent work on a film on the trade cycle. He concludes the discussion of these matters by saying "I think I represent among my friends the most 'radical' Keynesian attitude which—incidentally—involves the least 'planning'" (No. 244). The proclamation is intended directly to confront Mannheim's interest in "planning" as his next comment makes clear: "I cannot agree with your use of this word as for example in your phrase 'Planning for Freedom'" (No. 244). There follows an effort to set forth more precisely the meaning of "planning":

The only sense in which the word planning can be used in my view without creating misconceptions is to designate by it discriminative dispositions concerning an aggregate of particulars. Indiscriminate disposition over an aggregate of particulars on the other hand should not be called planning but simply legislation—law being a generalised command, as distinct from specific (executive) commands (No. 244).

It is clear that Polanyi here makes a sharp distinction between "discriminative" and "indiscriminate dispositions" and that he thinks Mannheim's "planning for freedom" blurs this distinction. "Indiscriminate dispositions over an aggregate of particulars" is law understood as a generalized command, which should be distinguished from specific commands.

Today, this is odd language, but it is easy enough to recognize that Polanyi's distinction is basically the same as that drawn in 1940 in his lecture "Collectivist Planning" that he incorporated as the second chapter of his 1940 book, *The Contempt of Freedom*.<sup>15</sup> Here Polanyi distinguishes planning as a method of ordering human affairs from what he identifies as the alternative method, supervision (CF 30). Supervision "ultimately relies on a multitude of individual initiatives which planning would subordinate to a central will" (CF 30). Polanyi draws his examples of planning from military actions. He sees planning as a comprehensive top-down activity: "no stage adds anything to the original plan as conceived by the one man at the top, every further and further detail fits into it, and has significance only as its execution; the plan does not change by being put into effect" (CF 33). Discipline is essential to planning or activities to be accomplished by planning (CF 34). Supervision aims not at simple execution but at regulating

manifold impulses in conformity with their inherent purpose. It achieves this by making generally available social machinery and other regulated opportunities for independent action, and by letting all the individual agents interact through a medium of freely circulating

ideas and information (*CF* 36).

In “Liberal society,” Polanyi argues, “there is a wide domain of activities in which ideas are cultivated under the supervision of organizations or public authorities” (*CF* 37) Such cultivation relies upon “widely dispersed sources of initiative” and requires that “mental communications are open throughout the community.” (*CF* 36). Polanyi suggests that

artistic pursuits, religious worship, the administration of justice, scientific research are the main manifestations of the permanent principles to the cultivation of which such a society is pledged. Supervision authorities guard the occasions and regulate the channels for these manifestations, and they keep communications free for public discussion and instruction concerning them, but must not interfere with their substance (*CF* 37).<sup>16</sup>

With regard to the law, Polanyi emphasizes that the state provides the machinery for the administration of justice but it also

rigorously guards the decisions of the courts from public influence. The courts are sole masters of their conscience and interpretations under the law which they are required to apply, and as they make their decisions, these are instantly added as amplifications, valid throughout the land, to the law from which they have just been derived. (*CF* 38)<sup>17</sup>

In his April 19, 1944 letter to Mannheim, Polanyi implies that Mannheim uses the words “planning for freedom” in a particularly loose fashion that obscures important distinctions regarding the law. Below we discuss Polanyi and Mannheim’s interaction in J. H. Oldham’s group, “the Moot.” For the second Moot meeting in April of 1939, Mannheim wrote a paper titled “Planning for Freedom” for discussion.<sup>18</sup> There is no evidence that Polanyi read this particular paper but Mannheim’s work inside and outside of “the Moot” overlapped. Gábor reports that Mannheim has used the expression “planning for freedom” in several publications by this time.<sup>19</sup> Apparently, Polanyi thinks that Mannheim is too quick to link all kinds of law to planning. He warns Mannheim “that we must not give new names to ancient human institutions but rather try to find the old names and conceptions which will cover, guide and sanction our modern endeavors” (No. 244). Polanyi offers to explain the importance of this point in more detail to Mannheim. In sum, what seems clear is that Polanyi views Mannheim’s ideas about planning as akin to ideas of Bernal and others who have championed a Soviet style planned science. By the time he becomes re-acquainted with Mannheim in England, Polanyi has spent some years vigorously arguing against such planning and he thus has no sympathy for any similar tendencies in Mannheim’s thought.<sup>20</sup>

Polanyi closes his April 19, 1944 letter to Mannheim by moving from his criticisms of “planning for freedom” to a more global criticism of Mannheim’s perspective as a sociologist of knowledge. He distinguishes Mannheim’s approach to history from his own:

As regards the social analysis of the development of ideas, suffice to say that I reject all social analysis of history which makes social conditions anything more than *opportunities* for a development of thought. You seem inclined to consider moral judgments on history as ludicrous, believing apparently that thought is not merely conditioned, but determined by a social or technical situation. I cannot tell you how strongly I reject such a view (No. 244).

Although, his ideas are not developed here, this comment is an important one that draws on earlier ideas developed in publications like *The Contempt of Freedom*. It is also a comment that foreshadows ideas Polanyi develops later about human callings and about the interpretation of history.<sup>21</sup> In *The Contempt of Freedom*, Polanyi attacks what he calls the “Marxist doctrine of social determinism and the kindred teaching of Fascism” for “claiming that thought is the product of society and ought therefore to serve the State;” such a view removes “all ground on which to consolidate an authority to which man could justifiably appeal against the commands of the State” (CF 10-11). Polanyi argues that “the realm of thought possesses its own life” and this means that “freedom is not only made possible, but its institution becomes a social necessity” (CF 11):

Freedom is made *possible* by this doctrine because it implies that truth, justice, humaneness will stand above society, and hence the institutions which exist to cultivate these ideas, such as the Press, the law, the religions, will be safely established and available to receive complaints of all men against the State and, if need be to oppose it. Freedom also becomes *necessary* because the State cannot maintain and augment the sphere of thought, which can live only in pursuit of its own internal necessities, unless it refrains from all attempts to dominate it and further undertakes to protect all men and women who would devote themselves to the service of thought from interference by their fellow-citizens, private or official—whether prompted by prejudice or guided by enlightened plans (CF 11).

Later in *The Contempt of Freedom*, Polanyi emphasizes how “guiding principles” complement supervisory authority:

As long as certain guiding principles—of truth, of justice, of religious faith, of decency and equity—are being cultivated, and as long as commerce is protected, the sphere of supervision will predominate and planning will be limited to isolated patches and streaks (CF 39).

He is clear that “comprehensive planning” must ultimately eliminate guiding principles and the freedoms that are basic to human activity in an environment in which supervisory authority is predominant:

Conversely, if comprehensive planning were to prevail, this would imply the abolition of both the cultivation of guiding principles and the pursuit of commerce, with all the liberties inherent in these forms of life. Hence collectivist revolution must aim at the destruction of liberty, and in particular must suppress the privileges under which Universities, Law Courts, Churches and the Press are upholding their ideals, and attack the rights of individual enterprise under which trade is conducted (CF 39-40).

In sum, the April 19, 1944 letter to Mannheim offers a condensed statement of Polanyi’s social vision, which Polanyi regards as fundamentally at odds with Mannheim’s vision. Interestingly, Polanyi suggests that his social vision came together only as he began to understand the British tradition and particularly civil liberties. Polanyi implies that Mannheim misreads the critical role of freedom in social life and that Mannheim is also confused about the role of planning in society. Planning cannot produce freedom but is by its nature an alternative to a liberal society with supervisory authorities that relies on the freedom and initiative of persons. The role of independent thought in society for Polanyi is central. It is the key not only to the success of endeavors

like science but of other institutions of liberal society.

### III. The Continuing Conversation

Mannheim's response to Polanyi, dated one day after Polanyi's letter, is an interesting one. Mannheim notes that he, like Polanyi, found their discussion frank and invigorating. He protests that Polanyi's letter implies Polanyi has misread his intentions in asking Polanyi direct personal questions. Mannheim says he explored Polanyi's development not in order to make accusations but such exploration was

only the expression of a human interest to find out through what type of experiences you arrived at your present attitudes. Just because I myself felt when reading your studies that there are so many points of agreement and similar ways of looking at things, I was also keen to find out where our differences lay.<sup>22</sup>

Mannheim then suggests that Polanyi's reaction to the social analysis of the development of ideas seems to be an emotional reaction that rules out further confrontation of evidence. Polanyi jumps to moral conclusions in proclaiming that social conditions cannot be anything more than *opportunities* for the development of thought. Mannheim thinks that sometimes there may be not enough evidence to conclude that social conditions are more than opportunities, but at other times there may be evidence that demands social conditions have a more significant impact.

At the end of his letter, Mannheim turns again to Polanyi's projected Routledge volume, asking for a short statement showing

the main content of the Introductory article to be written, how it will unify the two sets of problems with which you deal in the studies which are with me: the one being the discussion of the necessity for freedom of science and the second with social political problems of nations and groups, as, for instance, the article on England and the Continent and the other on the Jewish question (No. 245).

Mannheim's skill as an editor shows in the way he outlines for Polanyi precisely how he can pull his diverse set of essays into a unified whole:

As a possible title I thought of 'Re-discoveries', meaning by this that you and we all of a sudden rediscover values which have been taken too much for granted, and have therefore nearly disappeared from our consciousness and reappear as an answer to the totalitarian challenge. Such a re-discovery is that science cannot flourish with[out]freedom, that the Jews need not necessarily share the nationalism of the modern age but can make a better contribution by utilizing their peculiar chances of becoming a ferment in the integration of bigger units under Anglo-Saxon guidance, that England has a peculiar function in the re-birth of Europe, and that last but not least Europe as a new entity has to be re-discovered too (No. 245).

In early May of 1944, Polanyi responded to Mannheim's April 20, 1944 letter and this too was a lengthy reply. Polanyi seems to have believed that he could transform some of Mannheim's epistemological notions about the bearing of facts and evidence on human knowledge. He points out that scientific experiments presume

“that natural events can be analyzed in terms of causal sequences” but in a laboratory environment “failures prevail overwhelmingly over successes.”<sup>23</sup> A research director must work to boost morale in the face of regular disappointment. Scientists don’t abandon assumptions about naturalistic causality simply because apparent evidence does not support them. Polanyi argues that the case of science is analogous to that of moral life:

Similarly, I suggest, as moral beings we are dedicated to an interpretation of human actions in terms of right and wrong. The latter form a more complicated pattern than that of causality which had its application of course to an entirely different field. Moreover I suggest that as Christians and Westerners we are dedicated to seek and uphold human interpretations more especially in the terms of our own moral tradition. That is what we are here for, as I understand our purpose in life (No. 246).

Polanyi suggests that thinkers like Marx abandon this view, regarding history as “the manifestation of economic necessities conditioned by technical progress” (No. 246). There is a tendency in modernity to “regard material forces as the ultimate reality in human affairs” and once thinkers follow this course, they “will not find it easy to entrust their minds ever again to a more intangible aspect of these affairs” (No. 246). He concludes by saying that evidence seems only very vaguely connected to fundamental beliefs:

Evidence, in short, can neither kill nor create fundamental beliefs. What we accept or reject in these matters is life itself. To some extent we can choose our forms of existence, to some extent we are born to them, to another part again we may be battered by experience to abandon one form for another (No. 246).

He suggests that in the middle of

rising and falling convictions there remains fixed a deeper secret pivot of faith, round which we keep revolving; we follow throughout a code of duty of which we are so unconscious that we could not formulate one single syllable of it (No. 246).<sup>24</sup>

What seems clearest in the context of this discussion is that, unlike Mannheim, Polanyi holds that human agents necessarily have basic convictions, and also define “facts” and “evidence” in relation to such convictions:

So there is no way out. We must choose—and usually we have chosen already by implication. That is, we must choose in such a fashion that what we instinctively love in life, what we spontaneously admire, what we irresistibly aspire to, should make sense in the light of our convictions. When the prospect of such a solution opens up before our eyes, we undergo a conversion. Henceforth we do not doubt the faith to which we have been converted, but rather reject such evidence as may seem to contradict it (No. 246).

Polanyi notes that one of his essays, “The Autonomy of Science,” that he has sent Mannheim as a proposed part of a book makes precisely this case for those who are scientists. He points out that in making the case for “a professional life dedicated to the convictions of science,” he “was constantly bearing in mind the generalizations arising from this scheme in the wider field touched upon by your questions. Perhaps this letter conveys a hint of the programme of such a generalisation” (No. 246).

Just this “programme of such a generalisation” is what Polanyi undertakes in his 1951 and 1952

Gifford Lectures and later in *PK*. It is not difficult to see a rather direct line of development between this May 1944 letter to Mannheim and such passages as the following in *PK*:

We must now recognize belief once more as the source of all knowledge. Tacit assent and intellectual passions, the sharing of an idiom and of a cultural heritage, affiliation to a like-minded community: such are the impulses which shape our vision of the nature of things on which we rely for our mastery of things. No intelligence, however critical or original, can operate outside such a fiduciary framework (*PK* 266).

So also it is easy to notice the connection between ideas in this letter and Polanyi's later account of philosophical reflection:

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).

The letter exchanges in the remainder of May and June 1944 are primarily concerned with planning for Polanyi's book tentatively titled "The Autonomy of Science." Despite the fact that Polanyi seems not to have written either a précis or a synthesizing essay, Mannheim advises Polanyi on May 10 that "my publishers accepted my suggestions and they on principle will be glad to go ahead with the publication of your proposed book."<sup>25</sup> Polanyi proposed using the text of a recent broadcast in place of an essay synthesizing his book's themes.<sup>26</sup> Apparently, Mannheim did not think the text of the broadcast was a suitable substitute for a synthesizing essay. On June 13, Polanyi reports that he is ready to sign a contract and is "prepared, in fact I am quite eager now, to write a comprehensive essay which will fulfill the function of integrating the book and of bringing up the number of words to 50,000 or more"<sup>27</sup> Near the end of July, Polanyi reports to Mannheim that he has signed the contract and sent it back.<sup>28</sup> He asks if Mannheim is coming north and whether he would like to stop over at his home for a visit. Polanyi also sends Mannheim a copy of his "Reflections on John Dalton" published in late July and suggests this might be included in his forthcoming book. On August 10, 1944, Mannheim acknowledges receipt of Polanyi's letter and article. While he praises Polanyi's article, he cautions Polanyi that he should not put the article as it is in the book because the book will become an unintegrated series of essays. He asks Polanyi to send to him immediately a hundred-word prospectus for the book<sup>29</sup> but Polanyi replied that he was preoccupied:

I do hope you will allow me to postpone the statement about my forthcoming book for a few more days. I am in the midst of completing the last section of the last chapter of my book and would like to avoid turning my mind away from it. It is not quite easy to give a reasonably good description of the forthcoming book without thinking the matter over very carefully.<sup>30</sup>

By early October, the prospectus had been written and editorially redacted. Polanyi was not altogether happy with it (he suggested allusion to "wider problems" in later announcements and he complained that there is too much stress on his opposition to planning in science) but he accepted the following:

The Autonomy of Science. By Prof. Michael Polanyi. F. R. S.



The distinguished Scientist investigates the social conditions of scientific progress. As one of them he considers the existence of a scientific community of scholars. Out of their co-operation ideals and standards emanate certain scientific beliefs which together form a tradition and guide their work. Although an organ of society this community can only flourish if its autonomy is maintained. Any interference by an external power such as the State can only destroy this inheritance instead of fostering it. This plea for the freedom of science is extremely timely at present when in the name of misinterpreted planning State guidance is propagated by those who ought to be the guardians of scientific liberty.<sup>31</sup>

#### **IV. “The Moot” and Its June 1944 Meeting**

These late spring and summer 1944 letters also mention another venue in which Polanyi and Mannheim were to meet, J. H. Oldham’s group called “the Moot.” Oldham was an important British Christian ecumenist who, in 1938, as the world moved toward war, organized this intellectual discussion group. Its membership included a number of leading British intellectuals: T. S. Eliot, Eric Fenn, Walter Oakeshott, Geoffrey Shaw, Walter Moberly, Hector Hetherington, John Middleton Murry Alexander Vidler, John Baille, Fred Clark, Herbert Hodges as well as Mannheim. Mannheim had become a member of “the Moot” in its second meeting.<sup>32</sup> “The Moot” usually met in a retreat setting for a long weekend and Oldham organized and led the sessions. He was careful to keep the number of participants in any given meeting manageable and he divided the weekend up into a number of different sessions. Oldham’s hearing was impaired and he orchestrated the discussion in a very deliberate manner so that he could follow.<sup>33</sup> Usually, there was a set of papers, written by Moot members or guests, which were pre-circulated to those attending; different papers were slotted for discussion in different sessions. Each meeting ostensibly had a topic or major theme, but sometimes the variety of the papers suggests that the topic consisted in rather diffuse ideas.

Although “the Moot” began meeting before Britain entered the war, its focus was, generally stated, on post-war reconstruction and the role that the Christian church and Christian laypeople were to play in it. From the beginning, questions about how an order or a Christian order might shape reconstruction were central to discussions. “The Moot” was a diverse group with a range of different opinions but a shared concern for shaping the new post-war society.<sup>34</sup> Mannheim’s intellectual interests seem to have been a natural fit with the concerns of Oldham and “the Moot.” After Mannheim joins “the Moot,” he becomes – after Oldham himself - the most active Moot member, attending all meetings until the end of 1944, and producing a number of papers.<sup>35</sup> Clements notes that Mannheim was “the most prolific” author of papers in and for “the Moot,” while Oldham looked on Mannheim as “the most important” Moot recruit that he “ever secured.”<sup>36</sup> Taylor and Reeves report that Alec Vidler, a theologian member, also identified Mannheim as the central figure in the group. Further, they suggest that Mannheim’s views about “social planning in a democracy as an alternative to bureaucratic totalitarianism” had substantial support in “the Moot.”<sup>37</sup>

Oldham in 1943 became interested in Polanyi’s article “The English and the Continent,” which was published in *Political Quarterly* that year. This is one of the articles that Polanyi in early 1944 sent to Mannheim to consider as part of his proposed book. Oldham wrote Polanyi on 12 November 1943, asking for permission to publish a shortened version of the article as a “Supplement” (an occasional paper series) of the *Christian News-Letter*, which was a publication sponsored in part by “the Moot.” Not only Oldham saw this article and

was interested in it, but also Moot member Walter Moberly (another friend of Polanyi's) had been given the article by Polanyi and, on his own initiative, recommended it to Oldham.<sup>38</sup> Polanyi's publications and his interests in the late thirties and early forties thus seem to have had enough affinity with interests of Moot members to attract attention.

Polanyi was officially invited by Oldham, on May 2, 1944, to be a guest at the June 23-26 Moot meeting to be held in a rural setting near Horsham.<sup>39</sup> Polanyi acknowledges in a letter to Mannheim that he in fact owed this invitation to Mannheim (No. 248). In regard to this invitation, Mannheim rather generously compliments Polanyi for being so articulate about a perspective markedly different from Mannheim's own views. In this compliment are visible both Mannheim's respect for "the Moot" and his confidence in the importance of "the cross fertilization of Ideas" at this stage of history :

When I suggested that you should be invited to the Moot, I only obeyed my conscience, which told me that a meeting will be enrichment to you and to them. I believe too much in the creative power of a real discussion as to be afraid of rival views. The next period in history is one of the cross-fertilization of Ideas—so important after a phase of dogmatism. Personally, I felt I can trust you. I believe in you and know that you deeply mean what you say.<sup>40</sup>

The discussion at the June 1944 meeting certainly appears to have again covered some of the same territory that Mannheim and Polanyi covered earlier in their April 1944 meeting at Mannheim's home and in their succeeding correspondence. Eric Fenn's notes on this meeting indicate that H. A. Hodges provided two papers "dealing with the Christian attitude in and to the collective commonwealth."<sup>41</sup> T. S. Eliot, although he did not attend the meeting, wrote a letter commenting on Hodges' papers, which Oldham read to the group in the first session of the June meeting. Fenn's notes report that the session was lively and that Polanyi, even though this was his first Moot meeting, was outspoken and at odds with Hodges and Mannheim:

In the preliminary discussion, arising out of the reading of Eliot's letter and the working out of an agenda for the meeting, the chief point was a direct challenge by Michael Polanyi to the presupposition of Hodges' paper and Mannheim's position in regard to Planning. Polanyi did not think that planning was as decisive, or as new, or as sweeping as seemed to be assumed . . . . He maintained that western society showed a steady process throughout the Middle Ages and up till the present day. The dramatic departure was the Russian Revolution, which was not merely an economic revolution but a sudden "going mad" in the moral and intellectual sense. The civilised society had always been able to draw from its own tradition the power to extricate itself from social difficulties and clear up its messes. The Russian Revolution said that all history was wrong and had to be rolled up and begun again.

There was some preliminary discussion of this view, chiefly between Polanyi and Mannheim, and at the end of the meeting Polanyi was asked to elaborate his thesis in the form of a paper for the next meeting of "the Moot."<sup>42</sup>

This report of an exchange in the preliminary discussion was likely the reason that the other guest at this June meeting (i.e., other than Polanyi), Philip Mairet, reported in a letter 25 years later (1969) that he remembered, from 1944, a "ding-dong battle between Polanyi and Mannheim, the latter being taken by surprise at Polanyi's demonstration of the intuitive and traditional element of all vital scientific discovery."<sup>43</sup> Also the

twelve pages of notes on the several sessions of this Moot meeting make clear that Mannheim often is interested in and confident about social planning and Polanyi holds, as Fenn summarized his views in one session, “in a complex society it was necessary to rely more on individual initiative than in a simpler society.”<sup>44</sup> Fenn’s summaries of Polanyi’s views clearly suggest that Polanyi linked his criticisms of planning with comments on the Russian Revolution and his larger account of the development of modern history as the following summary shows:

The notion of planning rested in XIX century science taken up with such thinkers as Saint-Simon and Marx, and bearing fruit in the Russian Revolution. In 1917 there were none of the modern techniques (wireless, aeroplanes, bombs, etc.). There was only the deep inspiration of men who thought they could take the place of God; that it was their duty to command the good of mankind.<sup>45</sup>

## **V. The December 1944 Moot Meeting**

The last chapter in the Polanyi-Mannheim encounter in the context of “the Moot” occurs at the next Moot meeting held December 15-18, 1944. Unfortunately, there are not as many available records for this gathering as for its predecessor but the correspondence and some other material do point to some interesting things. As noted above, T. S. Eliot could not attend the June 1944 Moot meeting, but he wrote a response to Hodges’ papers and this response apparently initiated the June discussion between Mannheim and Polanyi. Although he did not attend “the Moot” as regularly as Mannheim, Eliot was an active Moot member and he frequently contributed to Moot discussions. Eliot certainly was familiar with Mannheim and the views that Mannheim promulgated in “the Moot.” While Eliot had considerable respect for Mannheim, his views were more socially and politically conservative than those of Mannheim.

Kojecky suggests that almost from the formation of “the Moot” there was a tension in the group between thought and action. By 1940, Mannheim was a Moot member who made “an appeal for decisiveness, and an active order, in strong terms, urging that a revolution from above must be initiated.”<sup>46</sup> Although he did not want to insist upon this slogan, Mannheim wrote,

The Germans, Russians, and Italians are more advanced than we are in the techniques of managing modern society, but their purposes are wrong and even atavistic. We may look to elite groups in our society, e.g. the Moot, or enlightened Civil Servants, to use these techniques for different ends. The new techniques constitute a new opportunity and a new obligation. We want to mobilize the intelligent people of goodwill in this country who are waiting for a lead. At the same time there must be a popular movement to back what the elites are doing. You cannot build up a great movement without the dynamism of social leadership.<sup>47</sup>

The records of “the Moot,” as well as other Eliot writings of this period, make clear that Eliot temperamentally as well as intellectually balked at Mannheim’s activism. Kojecky summarizes Eliot’s views by saying “in general, Eliot was attracted rather by the idea of an intellectual than a directly political form of action.”<sup>48</sup> In the early forties, Eliot is wrestling with questions about thought and action, about the nature of post-war culture and the structure of society, and particularly about the ways in which Christian beliefs and

values should shape public life. What is happening in Moot discussions is clearly central to Eliot's effort to develop his social philosophy.<sup>49</sup> In June 1943, Hodges prepared a paper for "the Moot" titled "Politics and the Moot" that Kojecky describes as "in many ways a defence of socialism" that came close to suggesting that continuing discussions in "the Moot" are in fact an evasion of responsibility.<sup>50</sup> Eliot seems to have been jolted by Hodges' paper, since he sent to Oldham five letters that were concerned with issues about the role of "the Moot" and these were circulated. The following is a part of the first letter:

Now it seems to me very doubtful whether the Moot, by the nature of its composition, is fitted to frame any sort of "programme" to which all the members would spontaneously and wholeheartedly adhere with no qualifications to blunt its force. We are actually people of as dissimilar backgrounds and activities as we could be and still have the common concern for Christianity and Society that we have. Hardly any two are even of exactly the same brand of Christianity. This variety is what has given the Moot its zest, and even its cohesion; it is what . . . has made this association, over a number of years, and bringing with it an unexpectedly deep and genuine sense of loyalty and kinship with the other members, so very fecundating. If it has made as much difference to everyone as it has to me, it has justified itself fully. But I am not sure whether these benefits are compatible with the fruits of collective effort to change the world, which we are so often adjuring ourselves to cultivate.<sup>51</sup>

Eliot did not attend either the October 1943 meeting of "the Moot" nor any of its meetings in 1944, in January, June and December. However he provided material that was used in most of these meetings in the form of letters to Oldham that were either pre-circulated or read to the group by Oldham.<sup>52</sup> It was apparently Eliot's letter criticizing Hodges's views that touched off the June meeting's disagreements between Polanyi and Hodges and Mannheim. It is also, however, Eliot's hand in Moot affairs that shapes a component of Polanyi's participation in the December 1944 Moot discussion. Eliot wrote a paper for the December meeting titled "On the Place and Function of the Clerisy." In September of 1944, Oldham wrote Polanyi that Eliot was going to write this paper for the December meeting and had requested that Polanyi and Mannheim be the respondents.<sup>53</sup> Polanyi wrote a letter of response of about 1200 words to Eliot's paper, which he sent to Oldham on 16 October 1944<sup>54</sup> and to Mannheim later in the month.<sup>55</sup> After reading Polanyi's response, Mannheim wrote a much longer response letter<sup>56</sup> and both were circulated with Eliot's paper, and Eliot's short responses to both Mannheim and Polanyi, to Moot members as part of the material for the December 15-18, 1944 Moot meeting.<sup>57</sup>

It seems rather clear that Eliot chose his respondents carefully. His social vision is in tension with that of Mannheim, but Eliot likely anticipated that Polanyi's views also would be in tension with views of Mannheim. Like Mannheim, Eliot had corresponded with Polanyi and was at least somewhat acquainted with Polanyi's views even before he had the opportunity to read Fenn's notes on the June 23-26, 1944 Moot meeting. In early June of 1944, Polanyi inquired about publishing a book on "Science and Human Ideals" with Eliot at Faber and Faber Publishers.<sup>58</sup> A mutual friend provided Eliot with a copy of Polanyi's essay "The Autonomy of Science." which Eliot reports that he read "with great pleasure and approval."<sup>59</sup> Eliot indicates he is impressed with Polanyi's essay and other Polanyi essays that he has seen and to which Oldham has referred.

## **VI. Moot Papers of Eliot, Polanyi and Mannheim**

Although we cannot here extensively review the contents of this interesting set of Moot papers, some comments are in order. Eliot's paper, as its title suggests, focuses on the role and function of the "clerisy," a term which he has apparently borrowed from Coleridge which points to an elite whose members have distinguished themselves by training. Undoubtedly, "the Moot" discussants recognized Eliot's paper as one more thread in the general fabric of common Moot discussions about postwar reconstruction and, specifically, their own role in that reconstruction. "The Moot" itself might be thought of as a "clerisy." Eliot argues that the clerisy originates the ideas and defines the sensibilities that are operative in a given culture at a give time. He ponders the links and distinctions between the clerisy and classes in a society. He identifies differences between types of clerics (intellectuals and emotives) and ponders the implications for society when too many clerics are unemployed; he speculates about a hierarchy within the clerisy and outlines ways different clerics promulgate particular ideas. Certainly, one current that runs through this essay concerns whether the clerisy can be expected to take concerted action of the sort Mannheim and others seem to have advocated for "the Moot":

The point is, however, that we cannot ask for any common mind, or any common action, on the part of clerics. They have a common function, but this is below the level of conscious purposes. They have at least one common interest—an interest in the survival of the clerisy. . . but they will have no agreement on how to promote this. Agreement, and common action, can only be by particular groups of clerics. When clerics can form a group in which formulated agreement is possible, it will be due to affinities which distinguish them from other clerics.<sup>60</sup>

Eliot ends his essay with four sets of questions that he apparently wants his respondents and Moot discussants to address. Most of his questions concern how the term "clerisy" can be made more useful and meaningful, but his last set of queries concerns whether the culture of Britain is declining in quality.

Polanyi's response to Eliot is a very positive one, although he does not try directly to address the questions that Eliot posed at the end of his essay. Instead, Polanyi says he wants "to define my own position with respect to it [Eliot's position] so as to make clear the points at which Eliot's remarks seem most helpful to me."<sup>61</sup> Polanyi begins by emphasizing that the heritage of the West is carried forward by the clerisy through what he terms "personal transmission"<sup>62</sup>:

in the modern West there exists and is being passed on from one generation to the next a great heritage of the mind: religion and law, hundreds of branches of science and thousands of technologies, history, philosophy, economics, and the whole wealth of language and music, paintings, poetry, etc. Most of this heritage can continue to live only by a process of personal transmission. If any part of it is not actively and creatively cultivated for a period of, say, 50 years – and successive new generations are not initiated to it – its secret is lost and it falls into petrification if not complete oblivion – from which it can be recovered only by the exceptional event of rediscovery. The first function of the clerisy is to keep the mental heritage alive and to hand it on to its successors.

Polanyi then suggests that the scope of knowledge in modernity is broad and this means that growth of knowledge continues only because there are today "specialist clerisies" such as that in the world of science.

Each domain of knowledge has such a specialist clerisy which is a

miniature society of experts whose function is to supervise the apprenticeship of novices, to preside over the discussions of mature members and pronounce a verdict on their achievements or at least to clarify their professional standing, to sanction (or deny) the professional character of their products and attach grades or valuation to these as they are being handed out to the wider public. I have outlined this structure for the clerisy of science in an essay “The Autonomy of science” [sic.] and I am glad to see that Eliot’s study suggests some new elements to be included in a generalised description of specialist clerisies.

Polanyi contends that a specialist clerisy such as that in science

collectively possesses knowledge and collectively conducts processes of thought which no individual could even remotely attempt to possess or to conduct. It is literally an embodiment of thought; if you damage it you impair thinking; if you reduce it you narrow down truth. The internal organisation of each clerisy must be such as to give scope to its internal necessities of growth.

Polanyi calls a specialist clerisy “a dedicated society” that is defined by its service to purposes that have been received by way of tradition and are believed to be good. A specialist clerisy is thus “an expression of faith in its particular realm.” This faith “consists in the acceptance as good of certain traditional skills, values and insights forming together a traditional inspiration.” But Polanyi points out that there is a tension within a specialist clerisy between the accepted and the new:

Each generation of a living civilisation must accept the overwhelming majority of thoughts as handed on to it; but at the same time it has to exercise criticism and make rational changes. There is a continuous clash of authority and revolt, of old and new inspiration.

Polanyi claims that there is no simple way to resolve conflicts and in a sense “the clerisy is at every moment literally in the hand of God and to this extent again society as a whole is in the same position”:

There is no one to decide then; each generation must decide certain points ultimately by force. It must keep the cranks and fools in check and must risk to starve many an unrecognised genius in the process of doing so. This is where each generation is left to itself—to hark back to the original inspiration of our civilisation; to its own conscience and to God.

Polanyi ends his response to Eliot by proclaiming that the life of the clerisy has bearing on three issues concerned with “ultimate power, ultimate truth and liberty.” The presence of clerisies makes clear that there are “social structures which are powerless radically to change their purpose, function and laws of growth because they can continue to exist only so far as they remain dedicated to the tradition of which they are guardians, expositors critics and promoters.” About the “problem of ultimate truth,” Polanyi says that a human being can understand and improve the world only “by attaching his faith to some parts of the heritage which then serve him as a guide.” This means that by maintaining faith,

truth can be pursued by a definite process of collecting experience and of interaction with

the opinion of the clerisy.

Every time we affirm any kind of validity (truth, beauty, etc.) we express by implication certain amount of faith in a part of the common mental heritage and also some reliance on the clerisy in charge of it. Thus every recognition of truth contains both a spark of faith and an element of social loyalty.

Polanyi's final point touches on his political philosophy and sounds very like comments made in both *The Contempt of Freedom* and his letters to Mannheim:

So long as clerisies live there is a rightful ground to stand up against oppression by the State, because to the extent that the State upholds the realm of clerisies its powers are ipso facto restricted. Hence subjection of the people to tyranny must always involve the corruption of the clerisy. It requires substitution of faith in traditional cultures, and the acceptance instead of purely temporal authority. That is the structure of totalitarian power.

What is visible in Polanyi's response to Eliot's paper are themes that are developed in his later philosophy; these themes are also nascent or to some degree articulated in other essays in the late thirties and early forties. Polanyi's interest in tradition, in specialization, in novel knowledge or discovery are part of his essay "The Autonomy of Science" (1938), *Science Faith and Society* (1946), *Personal Knowledge* (1958) and are treated in many other publications such as "The Republic of Science" (1962) which brings all these themes together in a mature statement. Eliot's reflection on the clerisy seems to have served primarily as a vehicle for Polanyi to begin pulling together the different threads in his emerging philosophy. Certainly, there is some affinity with some points in Eliot's discussion but Polanyi moves beyond Eliot's concern with reframing Coleridge's ideas about the clerisy to understand the contemporary cultural situation and "the Moot" itself. In fact, when Polanyi sent his response to Eliot's paper to Mannheim on October 23, 1944, he identified what he had written as containing "in very rough form the summary of the philosophy at which I am aiming by my studies of the scientific life."<sup>63</sup> He proposes to Mannheim that he "agree to my suggestion and accept the outline of ideas as stated in the letter to Oldham as the groundwork of my proposed introductory essay" (No. 254).

Mannheim's response to Eliot's discussion of the clerisy makes an effort to address the many questions that Eliot posed at the end of his essay. He suggests that Eliot's term would be more useful if Eliot distinguished it from somewhat comparable terms in the sociological and philosophical literature, including "intelligentsia" as he used it in *Ideology and Utopia*. Mannheim suggests that Eliot is really referring to an elite within the elite with the term "clerisy," since what Eliot is most interested in is people who have the mental capacity to break with convention. Convention breakers are important in dynamic societies, but Mannheim suggests Eliot's analysis is too simple if he thinks class is always a force against change while a clerisy is a force for change. Mannheim spends much of his space discussing how new ideas are disseminated in society. He implies that Eliot has a certain disdain for popularization, but Mannheim thinks those who "bring ideas into circulation"<sup>64</sup> are important:

This is why I think it is a mistake to consider those who express the real substance on a simpler level as publicity agents only. Those who succeed in the great venture of being genuine on the lower levels of communication, contribute at least as much to the preservation of culture as those who keep the existing fires burning in small selected circles.

In the third section of his response, Mannheim responds not only to Eliot's paper but also to Polanyi's response to Eliot. This is a section in which Mannheim reflects on the "promotion of culture" and particularly the role that tradition plays in such promotion. Mannheim identifies Polanyi's response as an "important contribution" of which he offers only one criticism:

If the things I have said so far are taken together, the real clerics are not only united on that abstract level of promotion of culture but their interplay is bound to lead to a new pattern. I mean a new pattern but not a new organisation. At present this pattern is only in the making because most of them who can see the need for a clerisy are on the defensive. This is my criticism of Michael Polanyi's otherwise very important contribution. He only sees the tradition aspect of culture, and gives expression only to the panic which so many of us experience when we see the danger that the little groups which handed over through generations their intimate experiences and specific skills are bound to be swept away by the vulgarising and organising tendencies of mass society.

Mannheim here seems to be criticizing Polanyi's notion of tradition as one that is more like Eliot's—tradition is distinguished from vulgar popularization.<sup>65</sup> But Polanyi's response to Eliot does treat both the conservative force of tradition and the challenge of new knowledge. To anybody who has read Polanyi's later thought, Mannheim seems somewhat to miss the mark. Polanyi argues that respect for innovation and creativity is part of the tradition of science at least.

Mannheim goes on to make clear how important he thinks the rediscovery of tradition is; he refers not only to his own earlier writing about the importance of closed groups but emphasizes the importance of personal transmission (Polanyi's term) and the need to integrate different levels of the clerisy:

The re-discovery of the significance of tradition is certainly very important and the exploration of the conditions under which tradition may survive should become one of the central themes of sociology. In this connection I wish to emphasise once more the needs for the existence of closed groups in which new ideas find time to mature before they are thrown into the open market. I still think that this type of exclusiveness is a precondition for creativeness in culture, but today I should like to add to this that the maintenance of culture is only one aspect of the story. The existence of small nuclear groups where tradition is transmitted through personal contacts is vital, but it is equally important that these groups should communicate with each other through personal contacts. Just as St. Paul saw his task in developing communication between Christian communities in order to keep inspiration alive in an expanding world it is even more important for us to invent the equivalent to writing epistles, to establish forms of real mooting beyond what organisation can do in this respect. A new type of clerisy will only develop if such a living web in a horizontal and vertical direction will unite them. Living contacts between the higher and lower clerics is as important as deep level understanding between the clerics of different nationalities. Thus, apart from the invention of new forms of popularisation the establishment of new forms of personal contacts between living groups and individuals who have the powers of inspiration is the outstanding task.

Mannheim seems to think one important factor in the emerging highly organized mass society is the need "to



find a remedy against the detrimental effects” of more organization and this he terms “planning for freedom”:

Planning for freedom means so to organise that the organisation itself should establish within its own cosmos those rules and unwritten laws which protect the solitary thinker, unorganised thought, the attempt at transcending established routine, and conventionalisation against the impact of the stereotyped mind. How this is to be done cannot be answered at this stage. Concrete experiences have to be collected and careful descriptions of lost battles of spontaneous minds in their struggle against the vested interests of routine, established in the name of which the clerisy can protect if injustice or victimisation occurs. As it is one of the essentials of democracy that it not only admits minorities and non-conformists (in the broadest sense of the word) but ascribes creative significance to them, it is equally important that it should defend those minorities on whose constructive co-operation the life of culture depends; culture as life and not as a routine and organisation.

## **VII. Mannheim’s Death and Polanyi’s Book**

Unfortunately, there are no Moot meeting notes reporting how the discussion of these three papers went in December 1944.<sup>66</sup> On January 1, 1945, Mannheim wrote Polanyi a short letter indicating he was pleased to hear Polanyi enjoyed the December discussion; he laments the fact, which apparently Polanyi had noted, that Moot members were dilettantes in regard to economics. Mannheim expresses regret about the way in which he criticized the rate of change in England: “I really feel what I expressed perhaps too abruptly at the Moot that this country cannot afford any longer to bring about change at such a slow pace as in the past.”<sup>67</sup> Mannheim indicates he is pleased to hear Polanyi is working on his book.

What we do know is that Mannheim must genuinely have liked Polanyi’s response paper or, at the least, he thought that the piece would serve as a good introduction to Polanyi’s projected Routledge book. On October 27, 1944, Mannheim wrote to Polanyi “I have read your comments on T. S. Eliot’s paper with very great interest and I feel they will make a very good introduction to the book.”<sup>68</sup> He cautioned Polanyi that the essay needed to become an integrating piece and not simply another essay, but Mannheim, ever the skillful editor, then gave Polanyi a prescription for how to accomplish this:

But this can be easily done because starting with the theme Tradition, you can at the same time reach your problems concerning the continuity in science and its autonomy, you can show that Europe is precious to us as a specific tradition and that just in this respect England has a chance of giving leadership and finally, you can discuss the problem of the advanced Jewish intellectuals as a specific configuration within the stream of European tradition. I am very much looking forward to the reading of the Introduction (No. 254).

The fate of Polanyi’s book with Mannheim is something of a mystery. The correspondence record does not mention the book again, but it does show that Polanyi tried to set up a London meeting with Mannheim in late May of 1945.<sup>69</sup> It also shows that Polanyi is hard at work on other projects. In March of 1945, he sent to Mannheim a 1944 article on patent reform that was perhaps published late or had just reached Polanyi. Polanyi seems to have sent the essay to Mannheim in order to make a point regarding his stance on centralization:

I would be glad if you could find time to read the enclosed pamphlet. It should show you that I am not at all opposed on principle to an extension of centralized control over economic activities. Actually, I am entirely in favour of it wherever the conditions require it.<sup>70</sup>

Later in the fall of 1945, Polanyi sent Mannheim a letter proposing a new journal to be sponsored by the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society.<sup>71</sup> Polanyi apparently had been working on this proposal and he asked that Mannheim seek support for this journal from Routledge, which Mannheim did, although the journal was not funded.<sup>72</sup>

There are no archival records of correspondence between Polanyi and Mannheim after the fall of 1945. Polanyi signed a contract for his Routledge book in Mannheim's series in July of 1944 and that fall the advertising summary for the book was completed (see discussion above), but the book does not appear in 1945 or 1946. If one looks at a Polanyi bibliography or the discussion of these years in Scott and Moleski, it is clear that Polanyi is hard at work on a number of publications, including *Full Employment and Free Trade* (1945) and *Science, Faith and Society* (1946). The latter is based on his Riddell Lectures at the University of Durham and it develops many ideas similar to components in the projected Routledge book. Perhaps Polanyi was simply too busy to complete Mannheim's requested revision of his response to Eliot, recast as an integrating summary of his essays selected for his promised book titled "The Autonomy of Science."<sup>73</sup> Polanyi may have had further discussions with Mannheim at the July 1945 and the May 1946 Moot meetings but there is no record of these meetings. On January 9, 1947, the day before the twenty-fourth Moot meeting at which he was expected and for which Polanyi submitted a short paper, Mannheim died of a heart attack at 54.<sup>74</sup>

Some material to be included in the projected book titled "The Autonomy of Science" was eventually published in 1951 as part of Polanyi's *The Logic of Liberty*, but this volume also includes other material, much of it published after Mannheim's death.<sup>75</sup> *The Logic of Liberty* was, however a part of the Routledge series edited by Mannheim, the "International Library of Sociology and Social Reconstruction."<sup>76</sup>

## VIII. Conclusion

Polanyi's acquaintance with Karl Mannheim in England stretches over the last three years of Mannheim's life. Records of this friendship are sketchy but there are several interesting letters that focus on a projected book that never was published. There are also some records of "the Moot" and two Moot papers that are interesting responses to T. S. Eliot. Polanyi's paper includes some early formulations of themes that are more fully developed in his philosophical works that come after this period. The Polanyi-Mannheim letters and some records of "the Moot" also reflect important philosophical differences between these figures. They seem to have held quite different views about the nature of knowledge, freedom, planning and the meaning of history. Polanyi's reviews of two posthumously published Mannheim works show that Polanyi remembered Mannheim in terms of some of these sharp differences in their perspectives.<sup>77</sup> Polanyi's 1951 review of Mannheim's *Freedom, Power and Democratic Planning* was titled "Planning for Freedom." Although this is a short review with praise for Mannheim's intellectual prowess, it ends on this note:

A sweeping mind whose power to assimilate and reformulate was unsurpassed in its time is present on every page. Yet in the end the process of 'planning' on which the book dwells so persistently remains altogether obscure. All kinds of social reform that have been practiced for centuries are comprised under this designation and it is not apparent what, if anything, is

to be added to them in a ‘planned society’. But in spite of such deficiencies that may be unavoidable in a posthumous work, the book will remain an important source for the study of Mannheim’s thought which has woven itself widely into the intellectual fabric of our Age.<sup>78</sup>

Polanyi’s 1952 review of *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge* is also short and it focuses on Mannheim’s optimism about the outcome of struggle in history between groups with conflicting interpretations. Pointing to the ways in which communism “crushed the free interplay of ideas on which Mannheim relied,”<sup>79</sup> Polanyi says history has not justified Mannheim’s optimism. He then turns again to his criticism of Mannheim’s view that minds are determined by historical forces:

But even as this outcome of history refutes Mannheim’s optimism it bears out his analysis of the modern mind which, having consented to regard its own mental processes as determined by the existing social structure, has renounced any standing from which it might pass judgment on an act of violence which transforms the social structure. In the pursuit of his false hopes, Mannheim has explored this fatal situation, which he calls “our fundamental trend towards self-relativisation”, more persistently than any other writer has done. While we no longer share his delusions we shall continue to profit from his penetrating account of a dilemma in which we remain deeply entangled.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> William Scott and Martin Moleski, *Michael Polanyi* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005): 194. Subsequent citations are simply Scott and Moleski and page number and, when the context is clear, citations are by page numbers in parentheses in the text. See also Scott and Moleski, 41, which indicates that Polanyi and Mannheim, as well as George Lukács are listed in Balazs’s diary entry of Dec. 23, 1915 as members of the Sunday Afternooners’ group. How frequently Polanyi attended and how long he was affiliated with this group are unclear. Scott and Moleski are relying on Lee Congdon’s work in “The Making of a Hungarian Revolutionary: The Unpublished Diary of Bela Balazs,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 8 (1973).

<sup>2</sup> Certainly there are suggestions in the early Polanyi-Mannheim correspondence in the mid forties (discussed below) that each figure already knew something about the other. Scott and Moleski (196) also provide additional evidence, including a letter from Oscar Jászi, showing that Polanyi has an interest in Mannheim’s work.

<sup>3</sup> Edward, Shils, “Karl Mannheim,” *The American Scholar*, Spring, 1995: 221. Shils, who translated some of Mannheim’s works into English and was a friend of Polanyi, offers an interesting account (221-235) of Mannheim. It is not clear if Shils knew Polanyi in 1944, when Polanyi becomes acquainted with Mannheim in England. But it is certain that Shils knew Polanyi before Mannheim’s death in 1947. Shils reports (“On the Tradition of Intellectuals: Authority and Antinomianism According to Michael Polanyi,” *TAD* 22: 2: 10-26) that he was invited by Polanyi to give an address in Manchester in January of 1947 (21). In Shils’ article on Mannheim (234), Shils also tells a story about telling Polanyi that Mannheim had died in January of 1947.

<sup>4</sup> Éva Gábor (ed. with assistance of Dézsö Banki and R. T. Allen), *Selected Correspondence (1911-1946) of Karl Mannheim, Scientist, Philosopher, and Sociologist* (Lampeter, Wales: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2003). Since most Polanyi-Mannheim letters have now been published and they are numbered in Gábor’s collection, first citations to specific letters in the collection are hereafter abbreviated, using only the number of the letter in the collection, the sender and receiver, and the date of the letter. Subsequent citations of published

letters simply note the letter number in parentheses in the text following the quotation.

<sup>5</sup> Richard Lee Gelwick, “Michael Polanyi: *Credere Aude* His Theory of Knowledge and Its Implications for Christian Theology,” Th. D. Dissertation, Pacific School of Religion, 1965: p. 11, note 8.

<sup>6</sup> No. 240, Polanyi to Mannheim, January 10, 1944.

<sup>7</sup> No. 241, Mannheim to Polanyi, January 14, 1944.

<sup>8</sup> Then in press but published in *The Nineteenth Century and After* 135 (February 1944): 78-83.

<sup>9</sup> *Memoirs and Proceedings of the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society* 85 (February 1943): 19-38. Also in *Scientific Monthly* 60 (February 1945): 141-150. Also as “Self-Government of Science” in Polanyi’s *The Logic of Liberty* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1951): 49-68. Hereafter *The Logic of Liberty* is abbreviated *LL*.

<sup>10</sup> *Economica* 8 (November 1941): 421-456. Richard Allen (*Society, Economics, Philosophy: Selected Papers by Michael Polanyi* [New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1997]: 362-363) notes this was partially reprinted (and/or reorganized and reprinted) in two other places later and in *LL*. *Society, Economics, Philosophy: Selected Papers by Michael Polanyi* is hereafter abbreviated *SEP*.

<sup>11</sup> *The Political Quarterly* 14 (October-December, 1943): 372-381. Also in *Fortune* 29 (May 1944): 155-157.

<sup>12</sup> *The Political Quarterly* 14 (January-March 1943): 33-45. Also in *SEP*: 33-45.

<sup>13</sup> No. 242, Polanyi to Mannheim, February 1, 1944. As Gábor intends to note (her footnotes to this letter [453] are scrambled), this is an early title for *Full Employment and Free Trade*, which is published in 1945 by Cambridge University Press. Later letters give this various titles but mention that Cambridge Press is considering the material.

<sup>14</sup> No. 244. Polanyi to Mannheim, April 19, 1944.

<sup>15</sup> Michael Polanyi, *The Contempt of Freedom: The Russian Experiment and After* (London: Watts & Co, 1940, New York: Arno Press, 1975). Subsequent quotations from this work are noted in parentheses with *CF* and page number only. Polanyi identifies the essays in this 1940 book as notes taken in the important years between 1935 and 1940 (*CF* 5). If you extend this period forward to 1943, it is clear this is an extraordinarily fruitful period for Polanyi’s developing philosophical perspective. Scott and Moleski (192) point out that Polanyi had written “fifty pieces in defense of the liberal tradition” by the spring of 1943. Five of these had been published, fifteen given as lectures, five were incomplete book manuscripts and there are twenty-five fragments and short essays. Although we draw on *The Contempt of Freedom* to set forth Polanyi’s developing views, similar ideas are found in this larger body of material. See, for example, Scott and Moleski’s discussion (184) of the late 1940 addresses “Planning, Culture and Freedom” and “Planning, Efficiency and Liberty.”

<sup>16</sup> Somewhat later in his discussion, Polanyi adds a discussion of how supervision is also most appropriate for “the economic field” (*CF* 38):

This field, therefore, cannot be managed by the imposition of a governmental plan, but must, on the contrary, be cultivated by a supervisory authority which assures the individuals of suitably regulated opportunities for giving effect to their desires. Supervision in the case of individual economic desires is embodied in the machinery of commerce, operating through the market which keeps commercial ideas and information in universal circulation (*CF* 39).

<sup>17</sup> There are some suggestions that Polanyi may have been particularly interested in the law in this period. There is a 44 page essay dated February 26, 1942 titled “The Law” that is apparently part of a longer manuscript titled “The Structure of Freedom” in the University of Chicago Polanyi archival collection (Box 33, Folder 2). This is an extended discussion of the law and its evolution; Polanyi compares the law and science and tries to show the law is a bulwark of self-government.

<sup>18</sup> William Taylor and Marjorie Reeves, *Christian Thinking and Social Order*, ed. Marjorie Reeves

(London: Cassell, 1999): 28.

<sup>19</sup> Gábor, 454. See No. 244, note 1.

<sup>20</sup> See especially Scott and Moleski, 185-186 for a discussion of Polanyi's work with John Baker and the Society for Freedom in Science.

<sup>21</sup> The idea of "calling" is developed in *PK* (see 321-324) as an alternative to this deterministic view. In *SM*, the book that he publishes in 1959 just after *PK* (1958), Polanyi's notes in the Preface (9) can be seen as both an introduction and an extension of the inquiry of *PK*; it treats the problems of interpreting history. See Yu Zhenhua's excellent discussion of *SM* in "Two Cultures Revisited: Michael Polanyi on the Continuity Between the Natural Sciences and the Study of Man," *Tradition and Discovery* 28:3 (2001-2002): 6-19.

<sup>22</sup> No. 245. Mannheim to Polanyi, April 20, 1944.

<sup>23</sup> No. 246. Polanyi to Mannheim, May 2, 1944.

<sup>24</sup> Scott and Moleski (197), suggest that this tracing of conviction to an unformlizable code is an early hint at the importance of what later Polanyi calls the tacit dimension. This seems correct although what Polanyi is at this stage beginning to work out is the fiduciary program rather than the epistemological model that grows out of it.

<sup>25</sup> No. 247. Mannheim to Polanyi, May 10, 1944.

<sup>26</sup> No. 248. Polanyi to Mannheim, May 27, 1944.

<sup>27</sup> No. 249. Polanyi to Mannheim, June 13, 1944.

<sup>28</sup> Polanyi letter to Mannheim, 27 July 1944, Box 4, Folder 11 in The Papers of Michael Polanyi held by the Department of Special Collections of the University of Chicago Library. All quotations of material in The Papers of Michael Polanyi are used with permission of the University of Chicago Library. Subsequent citations to archival letters in the Chicago collection will be shortened to the letter and date, box and folder number. This and a few other letters were not included in the Gábor collection.

<sup>29</sup> No. 252. Mannheim to Polanyi, August 10, 1944,

<sup>30</sup> Polanyi letter to Mannheim, 16 August 1944, Box 4, Folder 11.

<sup>31</sup> Polanyi letter to Mannheim with enclosure, 2 October 1944, Box 4, Folder 11.

<sup>32</sup> For a general discussion of "the Moot" and its context see Roger Kojecky *T. S. Eliot's Social Criticism* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1971): 156-197, 238-239, and Taylor and Reeves, 24-48. This list of members combines those listed in each of these sources.

<sup>33</sup> Kathleen Bliss, "Oldham, Joseph Houldsworth," *Dictionary of National Biography: 1961-1970* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 806-808.

<sup>34</sup> Taylor and Reeves, 26-28. See also Kojecky, 163 who points out that those who attended the first Moot meeting had received a letter from Oldham "raising the idea of a Christian order." Kojecky, 163-197 provides a rich account of the unfolding set of Moot discussions up until Mannheim's death in January of 1947. Ideas about an order or an elite with a special role are never far from the center of gravity in this group; this is the background for the December 1944 papers by Eliot, Mannheim and Polanyi on the "clerisy," the term that Eliot adopted from Coleridge.

<sup>35</sup> Taylor and Reeves, 25.

<sup>36</sup> Keith Clements, *Faith on the Frontier* (Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1999), 384.

<sup>37</sup> Taylor and Reeves, 25. See also, for example, J. H. Oldham's chapter "Planning for Freedom" in his 1942 book *Real Life Is Meeting* (Macmillan; Seabury, 1953), which is a review and paean of praise for Mannheim's claims for planning. See <http://www.chebucto.ns.ca/Philosophy/Sui-Generis/Berdyayev/essays/rfm.htm> .

<sup>38</sup> Oldham letter to Polanyi, 12 November 1943. Box 15, Folder 3.

<sup>39</sup> Oldham letter to Polanyi, 2 May, 1944. Box 15, Folder 3.

<sup>40</sup> No. 251. Mannheim to Polanyi, June 29, 1944..

<sup>41</sup> Notes of Moot Meeting of June 23-25, 1944, p. 1, Box 15, Folder 6. Kojecky, 164 (note) identifies Fenn as the scribe for the meetings for which notes exist.

<sup>42</sup> Notes of Moot Meeting of June 23-25, 1944 , pp.1-2, Box 15, Folder 6.

<sup>43</sup> Quoted by Kojecky, 155. There is also a letter from Mannheim to Polanyi on June 29, immediately after the June 1944 meeting, that indicates that Polanyi provided an apparently impressive “historical expose” (No. 251) at this (his) first meeting. It is possible that Mairé’s memory and what impressed Mannheim came not from the preliminary discussion in which Polanyi and Mannheim were at odds but from a later session of the three-day June 1944 meeting. Although there are no detailed Fenn notes on the final session, it is described in the order of events as a “closing discussion and statement on the philosophical position of science by Michael Polanyi.”

<sup>44</sup> Notes of Moot Meeting of June 23-26, 1944, p. 6. Box 15, Folder 6.

<sup>45</sup> Notes of Moot Meeting of June 23-26, 1944, p. 5. Box 15, Folder 6.

<sup>46</sup> Kojecky, 174.

<sup>47</sup> Quoted in Kojecky, 175, apparently from a 1940 Mannheim Moot paper.

<sup>48</sup> Kojecky, 176.

<sup>49</sup> Peter Ackroyd, 243 in *T. S. Eliot* (London: Abacus, 1985) acknowledges the influence of interaction with figures in “the Moot” in shaping Eliot publications such as *The Idea of a Christian Society* (1939) and of *Notes Towards the Definition Culture* (1948). Peter Scott, 71-73 in an article (“The Social Critic and His Discontents,” *The Cambridge Companion to T. S. Eliot*, ed David A. Moody [Cambridge: CUP, 1994] makes similar claims.

<sup>50</sup> Kojecky, 186.

<sup>51</sup> Quoted in Kojecky, 188.

<sup>52</sup> Kojecky, 194.

<sup>53</sup> Oldham to Polanyi, 12 September, 1944, Box 15, Folder 3.

<sup>54</sup> Polanyi to Oldham, 16 October, 1944, Box 15, Folder 3.

<sup>55</sup> No. 253. Polanyi to Mannheim, October 23, 1944.

<sup>56</sup> Mannheim apparently wrote his response to Eliot about the same time Polanyi did since he refers to it in his October 27, 1944 (No. 254) letter to Polanyi.

<sup>57</sup> These papers, with an introduction by the present authors, are forthcoming in *Journal of Classical Sociology*. Eliot’s paper has also been published as an appendix in Kojecky, 240-248.

<sup>58</sup> Polanyi to Eliot, 3rd June 1944. Box 4, Folder 11. Ultimately, Polanyi does not pursue the possible publication with Eliot because his agreement with Mannheim’s employer gives Routledge an option for two future publications. Polanyi to Eliot, 27 June, 1944, Box 4, Folder 11.

<sup>59</sup> Eliot to Polanyi, 7th June 1944, Box 4, Folder 11.

<sup>0</sup> Kojecky, 245. Also “Notes by T. S. Eliot” and “On the Place and Function of the Clerisy,” Box 15, Folder 6.

<sup>61</sup> Letter from Michael Polanyi, Box 15, Folder 6 (also Polanyi to Oldham, 16 October 1944, Box 15, Folder 3). Succeeding quotations without a source listed in this and the next several paragraphs, as the context makes clear, are from this same letter of response to Eliot’s paper.

<sup>62</sup> Éva Gábor (“Michael Polanyi in the Moot,” *Polanyiana* Vol. 2, No. 1-2 [1992]: 124) suggests that Polanyi’s emphasis upon “personal transmission” here is really the germ of his later term “personal knowledge.”

<sup>63</sup> No. 253. Polanyi to Mannheim, October 23, 1944.

<sup>64</sup> Letter from Karl Mannheim, Box 15, Folder 6. Subsequent quotations without a source listed in this and the next paragraphs, as the context makes clear, are from Mannheim’s response to Eliot’s paper.

<sup>65</sup> Kojecky notes (196) that Mannheim wanted to democratize knowledge, but Eliot thought this was either impossible or simply objectionable. Mannheim may be reading Polanyi's emphasis upon specialization as a simple elitism.

<sup>66</sup> At least no notes are available in the Polanyi archival material. Kojecky (239) lists Fenn, the person who took notes, as absent from this meeting so there likely were no official notes at all for this meeting.

<sup>67</sup> No. 258. Mannheim to Polanyi, January 1, 1945.

<sup>68</sup> No. 254. Mannheim to Polanyi, October 27, 1944. Scott and Moleski, 194, note 112 suggest a Polanyi essay "Three Periods of History" was originally intended as the introduction. There is evidence in the early paragraphs of the text of this essay (found in Box 29, Folder 8) that this was probably originally written as an introduction to the projected Mannheim book titled "The Autonomy of Science." As we discuss below (footnote 73), however, "Three Periods of History" appears to have become a part of another projected book. There is no discussion of "Three Periods of History" in Polanyi and Mannheim's letters, but it is clear quite clear in the letters that both Polanyi and Mannheim want to see Polanyi's response to Eliot reshaped as the introduction to Polanyi's projected book in Mannheim's series.

<sup>69</sup> Polanyi's letter to Professor and Mrs. K. Mannheim of 23 May 1945, Box 4, Folder 12, proposes a lunch meeting on the 31<sup>st</sup> of May that would include Eliot. Polanyi wrote a similar proposal to Eliot (23 May 1945, Box 4, Folder 12). Subsequent letters in Box 4, Folder 12 (Eliot to Polanyi, 25 May 1945; Mannheim to Polanyi, 25 May 1945; and Polanyi to Mannheim, 26 May 1945) suggest that a lunch for all three parties could not be worked out, although it is possible that Polanyi and Mannheim had lunch and Polanyi and Eliot met later in the afternoon of the 31<sup>st</sup> at Eliot's office.

<sup>70</sup> No. 259. Polanyi to Mannheim, March 6, 1945.

<sup>71</sup> No. 260. Polanyi to Mannheim, September 14, 1945.

<sup>72</sup> No. 261. Mannheim to Polanyi, September 18, 1945. Gábor, 459, No. 261, note 2 reports that Routledge did not fund the project.

<sup>73</sup> It is certainly also possible that Polanyi, either before or after the December 1944 Moot meeting, wrote another introductory essay. As noted above (footnote 68), Scott and Moleski, 194, note 112, have found an essay titled "Three Periods of History" in archival material for this period (Box 29, Folder 8). The text of this essay does suggest that the essay was intended as an opening essay in the unpublished book for Mannheim titled "The Autonomy of Science." "Three Periods of History" is, however, nothing like Polanyi's response to Eliot which both Polanyi and Mannheim seemed so enthusiastic about. As its title suggests, "Three Periods of History" offers a rather grand schematization of Western history that treats the period of dogmatism, the period of free thought or liberalism, and the contemporary period, a period moving toward nihilism. This scheme is an early Polanyi attempt to describe the critical tradition and its problems. This essay seems to fit with some of the suggestions in the letters and notes on the June 1944 Moot meeting at which Polanyi argued with Mannheim and offered an account of the transformation of history that the Russian Revolution represented (see discussion above). "Three Periods of History" is located in the archival material with a set of other essays from 1944 with curious numbered tags; Cash (the archivist who organized this material) identified everything here as miscellaneous short manuscripts. But the tags suggests that Polanyi at some point intended the essay to be part of yet another book other than that projected for Mannheim. In his original response to Eliot's paper, sent to Oldham in letter form (16 October 1944, Box 15, Folder 3), Polanyi mentions at the end of the letter that he has just finished a book manuscript titled "Principles of Economic Expansion." It is possible that "Three Periods of History" and the other material located with it are parts of this book that was never published.

<sup>74</sup> Kojecky, 196 reports that Mannheim planned to attend this meeting. Polanyi's "Old Tasks and New Hopes" published in the January 4, 1947 *Time and Tide* was material for this meeting on the subject the survival of democracy. There is a copy of this (dated 6 January 1947) among Moot materials in Box 15, Folder 8 and

it is identified as material for the meeting in an Oldham circular. A postcard dated 30-11-44 from Oldham to Moot members (Box 15, Folder 3) also indicates Polanyi's "Science and the Modern Crisis" was added late to material for the meeting. In his original response to Eliot's paper, sent to Oldham in letter form (16 October 1944, Box 15, Folder 3), Polanyi mentions at the end of the letter that he has just finished a book manuscript titled "Principles of Economic Expansion" that has a long chapter on the European crisis. He promises to send Oldham a revised version of this chapter "since it covers the field you asked me to talk about in December at the Moot." "Science and the Modern Crisis" is apparently the shortened and revised version. One copy of this essay that is in Box 19, Folder 14 identifies it as an "address delivered at the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society Meeting on 14<sup>th</sup> November 1944."

<sup>75</sup> Polanyi's 1951 (perhaps written in 1950) preface identifies the material in the volume as coming from the last eight years (*LL*, vi); a review of the separate ten essays in *LL* and their notes suggests that five and parts of others were first published after Mannheim's death. See also Allen's effort (*SEP*, 366) to run down where Polanyi has previously published elements of *LL*. Scott and Moleski, 194, note 112, are not quite on the mark in suggesting all of the material that Polanyi and Mannheim were working with was eventually published after Mannheim's death as *LL*.

<sup>76</sup> Mannheim is still listed on the flyleaf as the editor for the series, although the first edition dust jacket identifies Mannheim as the series founder and W. J. H. Sprott as the editor.

<sup>77</sup> The two posthumously published books by Mannheim that Polanyi reviewed are *Freedom, Power and Democratic Planning* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1950) and *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge*, ed. Paul Kecskemeti (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1951).

<sup>78</sup> Michael Polanyi, "Planning for Freedom," *Manchester Guardian Weekly*, July 3, 1951, p. 4.

<sup>79</sup> Michael Polanyi, "Mannheim's Historicism" *Manchester Guardian Weekly*, December 9, 1952, p. 4.