

That “Treacherous Footnote”: Assessing Grene’s Critique of Polanyi

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ABSTRACT Key Words: Michael Polanyi, Marjorie Grene, science and religion, evolution, teleology, dualism, frameworks, subjectivity, fallibility, commitment.

While acknowledging her appreciation of and dependence upon the philosophy of Michael Polanyi, Marjorie Grene in developing her own philosophical vision distanced herself from some aspects of Polanyi’s thought. This essay examines her critique of a) Polanyi’s incorporation of religious themes in his writing, b) the teleology present in Polanyi’s understanding of evolution, c) his alleged return to dualistic thought, and d) his confusing use of “subjectivity” in Personal Knowledge. The essay points out ways in which her remarks are sometimes trenchant and sometimes miss the mark.

Nobody understands the genesis of Michael Polanyi’s philosophical aims and insights more deeply than his co-worker in giving birth to *Personal Knowledge*: Marjorie Grene. Thus one must pay attention with special respect to Grene’s critique of Polanyi’s *magnum opus* in particular, and to all his philosophical positions in general. Perhaps her most extended critical engagement with *Personal Knowledge* (PK) is found in her Kent State keynote address, “The Personal and the Subjective.”¹ There she notes with dismay Polanyi’s description of “subjective validity” (on PK 374, with a footnoted reference to the beliefs of the Azande). She refers to this material as “the treacherous footnote, whose existence, however, I cannot in all honesty deny” (PT 171).²

What is so treacherous about this description and footnote, and to what extent is Polanyi’s achievement compromised by them? How else does she criticize Polanyi’s *published* work, and how well founded are her criticisms?³ In seeking to answer these questions, I will, then, be assessing Grene’s critique of Polanyi, and consequently assessing some aspects of her own considerable philosophical accomplishments.

It must be said, however, that the extent of Grene’s criticism of Polanyi should not be exaggerated. Her public criticism of his philosophy is relatively limited and is most appropriately seen in the context of her overwhelmingly positive appreciation of Polanyi’s accomplishment. The fact that her criticisms are limited is itself a compliment to Polanyi, for there are few thinkers she seriously engages that escape without being subjected to devastating assessments (even though she still sometimes makes use of their views). Polanyi, Merleau-Ponty and J.J. Gibson (along with his wife Eleanor) form the holy trinity among Grene’s contemporary influences.⁴ Still, Grene never pulls back diplomatically from blunt judgments when she feels they are warranted—her judgments are devastatingly dismissive of academically entrenched analytical philosophers, but she is also critical of her threefold contemporary philosophical influences and her own earlier views. Her frankness is part of her charm.

Before turning to the interesting issues raised by the treacherous footnote, however, I will briefly note three broad criticisms Grene eventually makes of Polanyi’s philosophy in general. Examination of these criti-

cisms will help differentiate Grene's philosophical orientation from Polanyi's and thus provide some context for the investigation of the treacherous footnote. The first two criticisms primarily are reactions against aspects of PK, while the third criticism is targeted more toward later developments in Polanyi's thought.

Three General Criticisms

1. Mixing Religion with Science and Philosophy

First, she is made uncomfortable by the theistic themes woven into PK. Of course these are included almost by necessity of its being based on the Gifford Lectures, which are endowed to deal with natural theology.⁵ Most fundamentally, her reaction is because "I believe by now (and this is now my commitment) that religion does so much more harm than good in the world that it is differences from it rather than similarities that need stressing in practices we wish to accredit" (PS 14). She supports Hume's view that on the whole organized religion encourages "superstition and enthusiasm" ("Reply to Kathleen Blamey," PMG 511). She is also concerned that introducing God into the discussion will alienate philosophers of science.

More specifically, she objects to the way Polanyi makes use of "the Christian scheme of Fall and Redemption" (PK 324). With good reason she claims that regarding the person groping for knowledge as analogous with the state of original sin is "utterly misguided" (PS 14). The Fall refers to a condition of alienation from God that is to be overcome, on one common reading, through the grace of God in providing Christ as expiation for our bondage to sin. The amoral "historically given and subjective condition of our mind" Polanyi refers to does indeed seem categorically far distant from the morally deficient condition of sin. Polanyi's analogy rests on the similarity between gifts of God freely given without being merited and gifts of discovery that are not produced or controlled by us but arrive as an Aha! surprise. When discoveries are separated from any linkage with the concept of sin, Grene affirms Polanyi's Pauline or Augustinian account of how we come to know:

Polanyi used to say that he was adopting the Pauline view that the proper attitude for human beings was neither arrogance nor despair, but hope. This seemed to me an illuminating view, and I took its religious connotations sufficiently seriously to agree that scientists seek only through faith, and find only through grace. Even then, I meant this in a very broad and metaphorical way that would satisfy few true believers. . . Can one be an atheistic Augustinian? ("Reply to Kathleen Blamey," PMG 511).

It could be observed that, although Grene does not make this point, Polanyi goes on to speak of a "technique of our redemption," which sounds like a manifestation of works inconsistent with the Pauline model of grace to which Polanyi claims he is committed. But does Polanyi really think there is a technique by which persons can ensure their redemption? His statement about a technique is as follows: "The technique of our redemption is to lose ourselves in the performance of an obligation which we accept, in spite of its appearing on reflection impossible of achievement" (PK 324). In context, it seems evident that the "technique" to which Polanyi refers is more similar to faith than it is to works or manipulative control. That he is supporting a posture of faith becomes obvious when he goes on to say that "we hope to be visited by powers for which we cannot account in terms of our specifiable capabilities" (PK 324).

Grene's rejection of Polanyi's interest in theism is consistent with her naturalistic understanding of the world and its processes. However, to others not sharing her commitment to thoroughgoing naturalism, her criticism of Polanyi's forays into religion would be seen as more a matter of her personal discretion than it would likely be considered a damaging criticism of Polanyi's accomplishments. That is, her rejection of religion can be viewed as an expression of the limits of her basic frame of reference. Indeed, perhaps Grene's dissatisfaction with her own articulation of personhood⁶ would be alleviated were she open to the way such religious concepts as the Christian notion of sin, the Buddhist notion of emptiness, or the Hindu notion of *lila* might enrich her rather existentially thin naturalistic notion of the person.

2. Polanyi's Understanding of Evolutionary Theory

Second, Grene also finds serious problems with Polanyi's understanding of evolution as presented in Part IV of PK. In discussing "Polanyi's gross misunderstanding of evolutionary theory" (PT 171), she rejects what she claims is his notion that humanity is "the apex of evolution" (PS 14), with its unacceptable implications of a teleological, progressive thrust inherent in the evolutionary process. Grene would certainly acknowledge that individual animals exhibit purposive behavior, but in concert with most contemporary theorists of evolution, she rejects the notion that the evolutionary process *itself* exhibits teleology in any form.

Thus Grene (and David Depew) affirm Robert Cummins' rejection of what they term "neo-teleology," the view that explains the existence of a trait by a process of selection that enables a useful function to come into being. "The neo-teleologist asks, for example, of a bird's wing, why it is there, and answers, because it enables flight—and therefore selection produced it."⁷ Neo-teleology is problematic because it surreptitiously slips in mind-like purpose or aim to a mindless process. Grene's Chapter 5 in PT, "Darwinian Nature," contains much that is thoughtful concerning teleology versus causality in evolution—see particularly pp. 102-107. There she discusses neo-teleology as problematic examples of "hyperadaptationism" and "ultradarwinism" (105).

Were she to have considered it, Grene would likely also reject as superfluous Polanyi's attempt to establish an "ordering principle of evolution" (PK 382), an active process of emergence that he thinks is necessary to account for the qualitative leaps in the earth's history of evolution. Polanyi thinks the sort of processes postulated in the neo-Darwinian synthesis result in "entirely accidental advantages" that can never "add up to the evolution of a new set of operational principles, as it is not in their nature to do so" (PK 385). He holds that an ordering principle of incipient stability is needed to explain the emergence of new operating principles. That this principle is teleologically tinged can be seen in Polanyi's claim that evolution is itself an achievement that "must have been directed by *an orderly innovating principle . . .*" (PK 386). He asserts that his conception of the generalized biological field he postulates as producing achievements is "of course finalistic" (PK 399).

Grene affirms Polanyi's vision of reality as hierarchical, but would not accept that evolutionary theory needs some additional principle to explain how emergence produces more complex biotic levels. Elsewhere I have suggested that complexity theory, with its notion of how systems undergo increasingly complex self-organization, can explain qualitative emergence, and it does so without relying on teleology.⁸ So while I thereby support Polanyi advocacy of explicitly describing how a systemic ordering principle contributes to Darwinian evolution, I would also suggest evolutionary theory incorporates processes that implicitly produce qualitative emergence. Such notions as energy producing photosynthesis and metabolism, mutations, genetic

drift, and indeed natural selection itself jointly function as an expression of dynamic self-organization. In any case, while individual living things are very helpfully regarded as achievement-oriented, I would affirm with Grene that the *evolutionary process itself*—a higher level operating according to different principles than those followed by individuals or species at lower levels—is not achievement-oriented and therefore does not manifest any teleological or finalistic aspects.

I would add here that Polanyi's thought about evolutionary emergence is compromised by the simplistic dichotomy he offers as apparently the only basis for explaining evolutionary emergence: the laws of physics and chemistry versus his higher "active" (vitalistic) explanation.

[T]he rise of man can be accounted for only by other principles than those known today to physics and chemistry. If this be vitalism, then vitalism is mere common sense, which can be ignored only by a truculently bigoted mechanistic outlook . . . Darwinism has diverted attention for a century from the descent of man by investigating the *conditions* of evolution and overlooking its *action*. Evolution can be understood only as a feat of emergence (PK 390).

Polanyi here seems to take the epistemological insight he gained by adding an active component to Gestalt theory and extrapolate it to the theory of evolution. His approach goes astray in two ways.

First, Polanyi seizes on the notions of maturation and achievement as helpful in explaining both individual and species development (see PK 395-400). He calls phylogenetic emergence

a process of maturation which differs in the most curious manner from that of ontogenesis; for it is a maturation *of the potentialities of ontogenesis*. . . We are actually facing then the operations of a phylogenetic field guiding anthropogenic maturation along the gradients of phylogenetic achievement—as surely as the embryologist faces morphogenetic fields derived from the gradient of ontogenetic achievement. (PK 400)

But the principles guiding the maturation of an individual from an embryonic stage to adulthood are not the same as the principles guiding the development of a species as it adapts to changing environmental conditions. By using the same notions of maturation and achievement to describe these two different levels of reality, Polanyi violates his ontological insight that different levels operate according to different principles and are not reducible one to the other.

Secondly, from an evolutionary perspective, Polanyi inappropriately prioritizes both the individual and the evolutionary process as themselves active, thereby slighting the importance of the dynamic evolutionary niches to which individuals and populations adjust and exploit if the species is to survive. As Grene suggests in advocating the importance of seeing humans in terms of the dynamic *Umwelt* in which they dwell, individual and environment interact at a level of complex capacities and properties. The potentialities afforded by a niche have features supported by the laws of physics and chemistry, but they are not reducible to these laws. Thus, for instance, feeding involves such complexities as flavor and evolved taste, nutrition, seasonal availability, scarcity, and on and on. This richness cannot be reduced to a simple opposition between the laws of physics and chemistry and vitalistic impulses of an individual or a process.

Greene is a philosopher of biology of the first rank, and her criticisms of Polanyi have bite. This merited criticism, however, does not necessarily undermine the basic integrity of Polanyi's philosophy. The flow of Part IV of PK could be purged of its teleology and progressivism without damaging its vision of an increasingly complex world of biologically-based achievement culminating at present, without pre-existing design or direction, in human reality. Indeed, in the preceding paragraphs I have begun suggesting how this purging might be accomplished. By using teleology-free complexity theory, remembering the crucial developmental significance of environment, and consistently holding to the distinct rules guiding each level of reality, the integrity of Polanyian anthropogenesis might yet be reclaimed.

3. Confusion in Polanyi's Later Thought

The third general area of Polanyi's thought that gives rise to Greene's misgivings is more diffused and harder to specify than the first two areas of criticism. This criticism was not made as publicly as were the two previously described areas of critique, and so might be considered as but a continuation of the constructive criticism she offered directly to Polanyi during the 1950s when the Gifford Lectures were being shaped into *Personal Knowledge*. It has to do with some of the lines of thought Polanyi developed after the intensity of his collaboration with Greene had waned somewhat. While the fiduciary program with its features of fallibility and commitment, and tacit knowing with its from-to structure of knowing—these Polanyian notions, which Greene had a hand in developing—remain at the very core of her mature thought, she does not believe his attempts to apply these distinctive ideas to such traditional problems in philosophy as other minds, universal terms, aesthetic theory, the nature of symbolism, and principles of explanation are always successful. Thus, for instance, she writes him that many of the diagrams he was developing to map different sorts of cognition (ones that eventually made their way into *Meaning*) are problematic.⁹

Perhaps no philosophical issue is of greater concern to Greene than rejecting the heritage of Descartes's dualism. The following claim can appropriately be taken as a key to Greene's most fundamental philosophical aim: "[W]e must get ourselves out of the double dead-end the Cartesian tradition has led to, or the Cartesian alternative, as Plessner has called it: idealism or subjectivism on the one hand and on the other an alleged objectivization that also shrinks into the subjective presentation of 'observables'" (PT 47). For Greene, the proper starting point of philosophy is the person as a symbol-using animal shaped by personal history and purposefully responsive to that person's cultural and natural environment. So when Polanyi even mentions a body-mind dualism in his later work, it is like a red flag to Greene.¹⁰

Her reaction against this distinction comes to a head in relation to Polanyi's paper, written in 1967, "Logic and Psychology." In that paper he declares, "We can formulate the mind-body dualism as the disparity between the experience of a subject observing an external object like a cat, and a neurophysiologist observing the bodily mechanisms by which the subject sees the cat."¹¹ He states that the difference can be communicated via a contrast between from-to and from-at knowing. But Greene denies that there is any real difference here.

Mind is not known in either case. You are not contrasting either mind & brain or knowledge of mind & knowledge of brain, but mind-working & brain-known. Besides, how can there be any knowledge that isn't somebody's from-to knowledge? . . . I don't see that the terms of your comparison match with each other. . . [The mind is not] an object, but how a certain organized being deals with its world.¹²

As Grene states, when a person observes a cat, perceptual integrations occur in the person's from-to structure; those process are the mind at work. The neurologist who, aided by some advanced technology, sees certain neurons as being fired when a patient is observing a cat, would also be integrating particulars in a from-to structure in the process of determining what neural events contribute to the patient's experience. Cats and neurons are empirical *objects* that can be directly (with mediation) known, whereas the mind, as an emergent *process* (“how a certain organized being deals with its world”) dependent upon the firing of neurons, cannot be directly known either by introspection (one can know the “contents” of the mind, but not the mind itself) or by outside observation. Polanyi thinks we can infer from people's behavior what the contents of their mind may be, but he never claims the mind can be known directly. The distinction between object and process is key to the discussion of body versus mind; the category of from-at does not get at this distinction and adds nothing to the concept of from-to.

During an inconclusive rapid exchange of letters on this topic, Polanyi has Grene proofread and return the galleys of the article in question to the journal publisher. She writes Polanyi on November 9, 1967 that “I just couldn't let your last revision stand as it was . . . So I changed ‘knowledges’ to ‘experiences’ and made two further revisions as per enclosed. Please don't be angry; what you said was false and not what your example exhibited. . .” On November 11 she writes, “It was rather nerve-wracking to assume the responsibility of altering your text—but neither could I assume the responsibility for permitting the text as it stood to see the light of day. . .” Then in a note on November 14 she adds, “Sorry if I've done something unforgivable; such is life.”¹³ I take it that this correspondence illustrates several things: that Grene identifies strongly with the non-dual philosophical position Polanyi (with her help) stakes out, that she is determined to protect that position against ideas that would betray it, yet that she honors Polanyi and his autonomy, and felt deep remorse at feeling she in this unusual instance had to alter his writing against his will.

Grene's attempt to edit Polanyi's 1970 paper, “What Is a Painting?” elicited from her the final example I'll note of her attempt to keep Polanyi harnessed to the core insights of PK.

All right, my dear—you asked for it! I've tried to edit the MS a little, but I can't make it other than rigid and prosaic—as well as wrong, of course! Its final message seems to me to be an utter betrayal of P.K. . . . But what the upshot of this paper seems to be is that an objectivistic, Laplacean view of theoretical knowledge is quite ok; only in art we have f[ocal] and s[ub]sidiary awareness and something that is entirely disconnected from either our ordinary or our scientific lives. Of course the truth of War and Peace or of Cezanne's Mont Ste Victoire is different from the truth of the kinetic theory of gases or the germ theory of disease; but this is a continuum, not a dichotomy.¹⁴

Grene is again nervous here about anything that smacks of a duality (here, science versus the arts), but I'm not sure that the issue is best resolved by settling on a continuum *alone*. True, there are aesthetic elements that may enter into formulating a theory, and there are theoretical aspects involved in judging art—the process of personal knowing uses a continuum of approaches. Judgments of beauty may be found in each discipline. Thrusts of the imagination are utilized by scientist and artist alike. But what is known in naturalistic science is different in kind, I would submit, than what is appreciated in art. Cultural symbols and practices are necessary mediators in knowing both realms (the continuity aspect), but what is known in the natural sciences continues to exist and function apart from the cultural mediators, whereas the arts would cease to exist without the cultural mediators and processes. The difference between these realms is also suggested by the contrasting

principles which are involved in judging truthful claims (and as Polanyi insisted, different levels are organized according to different principles). Notions of lawlike behavior and cause and effect, so central to scientific explanation, do not have comparable force in assessing artistic creations. Cultural trends and an emphasis on experienced meaning, so important in the arts, have little impact in the sciences.¹⁵ Scientific theories deal with the materials, structures, and processes of the natural world, where the scientific aim is to describe this world as it is apart from human desires and interests. Of course, this aim can never be fully consummated, as Polanyi so strongly stresses in his concept of the personal, but the objectivist aim of genuine science is ever-present. In contrast, artistic creations are distinctly human products expressive of and assessed in terms of human sensitivities, aspirations and standards. A scientific approach to the arts and a cultural approach to the sciences have been attempted, but I would claim the results are of limited usefulness if not incoherent. However, a scientist critiquing experimental results and a critic judging art both make claims about their subjects with universal intent (and thereby there is a continuum of truth claims exhibiting varying degrees of verification or validity). Grene, then, appropriately aspires to maintain the continuity of intellectual processes involved in science, the arts, and humanities, but Polanyi is consistent in seeking out unique characteristics of different levels of reality.

In general, Grene's criticisms of Polanyi's later writings have merit, and this is in part because as he aged Polanyi's mental acuity declined. But it must also be said that sometimes her own commitments are overly rigid, and she may have inappropriately tried to rein in potentially fruitful new avenues of thought Polanyi was trying to explore. Thus, for instance, I find Polanyi's exploration of the diverse roles of "interest" in different forms of consciousness to be highly suggestive and interesting, whereas Grene seems unappreciative of how Polanyi attempts to chart the epistemological impact of various arrangements of interest in *Meaning*. Similarly, in her battle against Cartesian dualism she is adverse to any use of the term "consciousness" as overly wedded to mind as distinct from matter. In her "Reply to Anthony N. Perovich Jr.," she writes, "You want total, utter objectivity; you don't find it, so you fall back on a secret, inner something to fill this uncomfortable gap. . . But what would [consciousness] tell me about what it is to be a human being, to live a human life? Not much, I think" (PMG , 195). Her question in this quotation reveals some of her rigidity: "consciousness" has many legitimate uses besides dealing with the question of what constitutes a human life. It is often helpful to use the term "consciousness" in distinguishing between our thought and what our thought is about.

The Treacherous Footnote

Beyond her antipathy toward Polanyi's approach to evolutionary theory, there is an additional item in Part IV of *Personal Knowledge* that Grene lambasts, and at last we have come to that treacherous footnote. In the relevant passage, Polanyi describes four grades of knowledge:

- (1) *Correct* inferences made within a *true system*.
- (2) Erroneous conclusions arrived at within a true system (like an *error* committed by a *competent* scientist).
- (3) Conclusions arrived at by the correct use of a fallacious system. This is an *incompetent* mode of reasoning, the results of which possess *subjective validity*.^{fn}
- (4) *Incoherence* and *obsessiveness* as observed in the ideation of the insane, particularly in schizophrenia. The morbid reasoning of sufferers from systematic delusions should also be classed here, rather than under (3), since such delusions impair the very core of a person's rationality. (PK 374)

Polanyi's footnote at the end of the third point (i.e., the superscripted "fn" above, which Grene alleges is "treacherous") refers back to Polanyi's discussion of implicit beliefs (PK 286-288) that form the frameworks or idioms of belief that guide our thought processes. This section on implicit beliefs focuses especially on the thought processes of the Azande. Therefore it may reasonably be inferred that Polanyi sees the framework of belief that the Azande indwell to be a "fallacious system" resulting in claims that have "subjective validity." And what is wrong with this analysis?

Let us first turn to the complainant's description of how Polanyi goes astray in this quotation. Grene notes that the purpose of Polanyi's list is to refine "the distinction between the subjective and the personal," and that he

counts as 'subjective' commitments made to a mistaken system, so that Zande practices now turn up (in a footnote which I had not previously noticed) as subjective rather than personal. We, the heirs of a modern European liberal tradition, turn out to be the only human beings who make commitments with universal intent. Everybody else is following a mere subjective impulse. This seems to me a sad betrayal of Polanyi's fundamental impulse (PT 170).

Next we need to determine what the "fundamental impulse" is that Grene thinks is being betrayed. Here are three plausible candidates:

- * The claim that all knowing is personal.
- * The fallibilistic nature of human knowing.
- * The fiduciary program centered on commitment.

In practice, each of these candidates is so fully intertwined with the other two that it would seem artificially abstract to separate out one of them as the intended impulse. So let us consider the fundamental impulse that Grene claims Polanyi violates to be the comprehensive notion of personal knowing centered on fallible commitment.

Now we can more precisely formulate the charge Grene appears to be bringing against Polanyi's passage with its treacherous footnote. She claims that in labeling the Azande framework of belief as false and merely of subjective validity, Polanyi has assumed a dogmatic stance inconsistent with (1) his belief that all serious explanations are made with universal (not merely subjective) intent, and (2) his concession that all frameworks of thought to which one is committed may be totally mistaken, including one's own (PK 404). With respect to (1), Grene claims Polanyi is introducing into PK a new meaning of "subjectivity" that is confusing because it has a connotation that conflicts with his previous twofold use of the term.

To what extent is Polanyi's usage defensible, and to what extent does Grene's complaint hit the mark? I believe Grene has identified a real problem in Polanyi's conceptuality, but that her implied resolution of the problem is not adequate. I'll make seven interpretive points with respect to the passage in question and Grene's analysis of it.

First, Grene's analysis of Polanyi's understanding of "subjectivity" is too limited. She notes that in most of PK Polanyi uses "subjective" in either of two senses: as "either 1) the passive and immediate or 2) that component of commitment, at once active and passive, that marks it out as *mine*" (PS 7). How, then, would she understand the following uses?

*“My recognition of a pattern *may* be subjective, but only in the sense that it is mistaken. The shapes of the constellations are subjective patterns, for they are due to accidental collocations . . .” (PK 37).

*“[I distinguish] between a competent line of thought, which may be erroneous, and mental processes that are altogether illusory and incompetent. The latter I would class for the moment with passive mental states, as purely subjective” (PK 318).

*“Subjective knowing is classed as passive; only knowing that bears on reality is active, personal, and rightly to be called objective” (PK 403).

In these passages, Polanyi speaks of subjectivity as involving erroneous judgment, much as he does in the treacherous footnote passage. Thus he uses “subjectivity” in three, not two, distinguishable senses.

Second, while Polanyi’s occasional equation of subjectivity with error does not just appear for the first time in conjunction with the treacherous footnote, Grene is quite right to point out that this is an incoherent and problematic usage. This is a significant point calling for further examination.

Let us look at Polanyi’s claim in the first example above that referring to, say, Ursa Major is a mistake, for it is only an accidental pattern having subjective validity. Why wouldn’t a child’s perception and identification of the pattern of stars traditionally called Ursa Major be an act made with universal intent that is culturally correct? Polanyi’s analysis betrays a not so latent positivism suggesting that only a claim making use of a scientifically established, law abiding pattern is objective and real. Just as troubling is Polanyi’s claim in the third passage just quoted that only knowing that bears on reality is personal. The Azande claim that benge reveals causes of wrongdoing is surely made with universal intent within the Azande cultural frame of reference. It expresses “the personal in us, which actively enters into our commitments” (PK 300) just as much as a scientific claim does. There is indeed a problem Grene has identified with Polanyi equating subjectivity with error. Rather, subjectivity seems to be best seen as characteristic of uncommitted states of mind (PK 303), material passively received and unreflectively passed on, the contents of which may be valid or invalid.

I’d note, however, that we have only just touched on an aspect of Polanyi’s thought deserving of more careful attention than it has generally received. What, in Polanyi’s view, is the status in the range of personal knowing of each of the following statements among many possible examples: “I feel tired.” “This soup tastes bad.” “The Empire State building is the tallest in the world.” “Picasso is a greater artist than Monet.” “Scrooge was a tightwad.” The language of “subjectivity,” “personal knowing,” “error,” “truth” as “the rightness of an action” (PK 324) in contrast to “a true system” (PK 374), and so on, stands in need of further clarification. The four points made in the table from PK 374 quoted above is a flawed start toward needed precision.

Third, let us suppose we agree with Grene that it seems imperialistic and dogmatic to call the belief systems of anybody else false. Then we would be plunged into a relativistic world in which truth, an essential value for Polanyi, loses its power. We would be captives to a rhetorically-structured rather than a truth-revealing world if there were no transpersonal criterion by which to judge the truth or falsity of competing systems of thought. Neither Polanyi nor Grene accepts a relativistic epistemology as adequate, so Grene’s reaction against calling an apparently flawed framework “false” appears to be an over-reaction. However, to be consistent with the indeterminate, a-critical nature of our adoption of at least some elements of a framework, any claim that a rival framework is false should be offered in a modest, confessional manner reflective of the fallible nature of personal knowing.

Fourth, Polanyi most emphatically thought that a criterion for distinguishing a true from a false framework does exist: the capacity of a system to make contact with reality now and in the future. He quite clearly claims that insofar as the Azande system of thought is centered on witchcraft, it dismisses evidence that might question the validity of its set of assumptions (PK 288-292). It is therefore not fully open to the manifestations of the real, and so the framework may be called methodologically false.¹⁶ Judgments based on frameworks not intentionally open to the full witness of reality don't seem to me to be best characterized as "an incompetent mode of reasoning" (PK 374), but it is likely that such judgments are incomplete or erroneous.

Fifth, Grene claims Polanyi contrasts the Azande conceptual framework with the "modern European liberal tradition," but Polanyi does not make that contrast. In fact, he classifies some modern European liberal traditions, such as positivism and behaviorism, as being comparable to Azande belief. "Our objectivism, which tolerates no open declaration of faith, has forced modern beliefs to take on implicit forms, like those of Azande" (PK 288). Moreover, Grene says Polanyi denies that the Azande make commitments with universal intent—that only we Europeans (and Americans) do this. But, again, that is not what Polanyi says. The Azande speak of benge magic and witchcraft with universal intent, but their claims are false because their informing framework is erroneous (PK 294).

Sixth, in an open frame of mind in which one attempts to take judicious account of all available evidence, one is called to speak the truth of one's commitment with both passion and humility. One might be wrong in regard to one's claims, but with respect to satisfying one's passion to know as a responsible member of society, public proclamation of one's beliefs and discoveries from within one's considered framework is a necessary step toward contributing to the store of knowledge by which society as a whole prospers. Polanyi notes that "while appetites are guided by standards of private satisfaction, a passion for mental excellence believes itself to be fulfilling universal obligations. This distinction is vital to the existence of culture" (PK 174). Further, Polanyi states, "By contrast to the satisfaction of appetites, the enjoyment of culture creates no scarcity in the objects offering gratification, but secures and ever widens their availability to others" (PK 174). Labeling other frameworks as false for reasons one gives, as Polanyi does in discussing the Azande, must be seen in a positive light as inviting public discussion of the reasons given and conclusions arrived at, for Polanyi also emphasizes that rational persuasion is the mark of a convivial society (PK 378; LL 202). So, again, it seems that Grene's reaction against Polanyi's "dogmatism" is overdone.

Seventh, if Grene scolds Polanyi for claiming that some frameworks are false even while she accepts his fiduciary stance of commitment, her scolding reveals a contradiction between her own conceptions and her actions. After all, Grene is not hesitant at labeling false or incoherent the assumptions and foundational ideas of a most variegated groups of thinkers. That is, her own actions are an expression of the alleged wrongdoing of which she accuses Polanyi. Of course, since I think Polanyi's assessments of others' frameworks is perfectly compatible with his notions of fallibility and commitment, I also don't see any problem with Grene's negative assessments. I just don't see why she thinks Polanyi should not make these assessments, so long as he does so with universal intent and while confessing the personal nature of his claims.¹⁷

In sum, Grene helpfully calls attention to the possible confusion that Polanyi creates by saying the correct use of a fallacious system has "subjective validity." Polanyi contrasts subjective experiences as passive or non-committal with claims that seek to make objective claims. Verification involves less personal participation in the claims about some subject matter than validation. "But both *verification* and *validation* are everywhere an acknowledgement of a commitment: they claim the presence of something real and external to the speaker. As distinct from both of these, subjective experiences can only be said to be *authentic*, and

authenticity does not involve a commitment in the sense in which both verification and validation do” (PK 202).¹⁸ Since, however, we acknowledge that the Azande speak with universal intent while using a fallacious system, it follows that they are claiming their magical acts have real results which are external to the speaker. Within the logic of their circular system, they believe their claims are more than subjective in either of the two senses Polanyi normally uses. To avoid the appearance of inconsistency, he should have said these claims are invalid, not that they manifest subjective validity.¹⁹ Grene’s comments helpfully lead to this conclusion.

Conclusion

As mentioned in my introductory comments, generally Grene identifies with Polanyi’s philosophical stance, although largely through the influence of Merleau-Ponty and the Gibsons she modifies and extends some aspects of it. She is an engaging writer; I have found her *A Philosophical Testament* to be one of the most interesting works of philosophy published in the last several decades. But, as I have also indicated, I also find her criticisms of Polanyi’s thought to be spotty and uneven. Her understanding of evolutionary theory is far deeper and more nuanced than Polanyi’s understanding, and to that extent her criticisms of Part IV of *Personal Knowledge* are insightful and well taken. Her reaction against Polanyi’s interest in religion seems rather idiosyncratic. Her attempts to counsel Polanyi in the last years of his philosophizing are generally on the right track but also sometimes constricting and unsympathetic. And her rejection of the passage in which she finds the treacherous footnote identifies, I have argued, problems in the clarity of Polanyi’s exposition, although she does not offer a satisfactory alternative. For the most part, however, I think the philosophical visions of Polanyi and Grene are harmonious and mutually enriching—even more so than Grene at times seems to believe.

Endnotes

¹Grene’s address is published both in *Polanyiana* 2:4/3:1 (1992) and in *Tradition and Discovery* 22:3 (1995-1996), 6-16, the version cited in this essay. One can find reflections by Grene on Polanyi’s philosophy in many other places. Her Introduction to *Knowing and Being*, the articles by Polanyi that she edited, is primarily an exposition of Polanyi’s theory of knowledge as a whole rather than a focused assessment of *Personal Knowledge*. The same broad, while still philosophically acute, interpretation of Polanyi’s philosophical achievement is found in her “Tacit Knowing: Grounds for a Revolution in Philosophy,” *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 8:3 (October, 1977), 164-171. The scope of Grene’s involvement with and criticism of *Personal Knowledge* is set forth with great clarity by Phil Mullins in this issue of *Tradition and Discovery*, and other articles he has written interpreting Grene’s thought, referenced in his article in this issue, provide further useful background information. I will make primary use of and internally cite Grene’s “The Personal and the Subjective”—hereafter PS—and her *A Philosophical Testament* (Chicago: Open Court, 1995)—hereafter PT.

² In a comment published in 2002, Grene reaffirms her criticism of Polanyi: “I do still distrust that ‘treacherous footnote’” (“Reply to Phil Mullins,” *The Philosophy of Marjorie Grene* [The Library of Living Philosophers, Volume 29], ed. by Randall E Auxier and Lewis Edwin Hahn [Chicago: Open Court, 2002], 62). This volume is hereafter cited as PMG.

³Since Grene was in ongoing critical dialogue with Polanyi, it is useful to distinguish between her critique of Polanyi’s publications, the publicly endorsed ideas emphasized in this article, and the informal conversations and correspondence that sometimes resulted in the mutual adjustment of thought or in the fine-tuning of Polanyi’s ideas that eventually appeared in print.

⁴ “[I]t is successively Polanyi, Merleau-Ponty, and Gibson who mark the significant stages on my (intellectual) life’s way” (“Reply to Jacquelyn Ann K. Kegley,” PMG 81).

⁵Of course Polanyi's earlier *Science, Faith and Society*, like PK, contains references to God. I do not mean to suggest the theological references were forced on Polanyi, for he believed a religious foundation, properly laid out, was beneficial to society.

⁶Grene originally intended to call *A Philosophical Testament* "Persons" (PT 173), but she feels she has not yet come up with a comprehensive and satisfactory account of what it is to be a person. "Being a person is precarious. I'm as sure as I am of anything that it's not just being a nervous system, or being a product of natural selection, or being a bunch of molecules. But what more it is both difficult to say and difficult to maintain" (PT 184).

⁷Marjorie Grene and David Depew, *The Philosophy of Biology: An Episodic History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 319.

⁸See my "Polanyi on Teleology: A Response to John Apczynski and Richard Gelwick," *Zygon* 40:1 (March 2005), 95. In this article, I critique Polanyi's progressivism and teleology along lines I believe Grene would accept.

⁹Grene appreciated Polanyi's emphasis on the role that passion plays in epistemology. And she certainly was not hesitant about expressing herself passionately. Thus with respect to material Polanyi wrote supporting one of his prospective diagrams, she added in pen this exclamation to her more restrained typed comments: "Please rewrite that flag piece more soberly—it makes me want to vomit!!" (Letter of January 11, 1970, Papers of Michael Polanyi in the Department of Special Collections of the University of Chicago Library, Box 16, Folder 5).

¹⁰While Polanyi may not have been as cautious as he should have been in referring to the body and the mind, I believe Grene over-reacts to Polanyi's use of these terms. Certainly, Polanyi never sees body and mind as two separate substances à la Descartes. In his hierarchical vision of reality, body and mind may be seen as two among many ontological levels. They are the levels most important in the daily life of humans, and it should be possible to use these terms without being accused of being a dualist. Essentially, Polanyi is a pluralist.

¹¹Michael Polanyi, "Logic and Psychology," *American Psychologist* 23:1 (January 1968), 39. See the comparable discussion by Polanyi in his "Life's Irreducible Structure," the last article included in KB, especially KB 237.

¹²Letter of October 28, 1967 from Grene to Polanyi in Papers of Michael Polanyi, Box 16, Folder 1.

¹³This November correspondence is found in Box 16, Folder 4 of Papers of Michael Polanyi. The changes Grene makes are quite mild; for instance, she does not change the reference to the mind-body dualism mentioned at the beginning of the quotation referenced in footnote 11. This implies she recognizes here the legitimacy of Polanyi's pluralism even as she blanched at his use of dualistic terminology. I surmise that Polanyi called the mind-body distinction a dualism because he was trying to show how his thought solved the dilemmas associated with dominant philosophical ideas from the past, not that he had somehow lapsed into substance dualism himself.

¹⁴Grene's letter to Polanyi of January 11, 1970 in Box 16, Folder 5 of Papers of Michael Polanyi.

¹⁵By insisting on continuities, I wonder if Grene is not herself being somewhat inconsistent. Teleological concerns are embedded in artistic creations, but Grene, as we have seen, is intent on purging any such aspects from science. To her, there is a difference in kind between the arts and the sciences; they do not exist as degrees on a continuum. And ironically enough, Grene's criticisms of Polanyi's anthropogenesis in Part IV of PK can be interpreted as her attempt to eliminate what she saw as unscientific continuities in his thought.

¹⁶Andy Sanders has written persuasively on the tension in Polanyi's thought between the need to affirm one's commitments even in the face of apparently contrary evidence and the stance of fallibilism. He claims Polanyi opts for a methodological dogmatism "which prescribes that one should stick to one's theories or beliefs as long as it is reasonably possible. . . . For, as already C.S. Peirce (and in his footsteps Popper and

others) pointed out, if we [give up our theories too soon], we would deprive ourselves of the opportunity to find out their strength” (Andy F. Sanders, “Tacit Knowing—Between Modernism and Postmodernism: A Problem of Coherence,” *Tradition and Discovery* 18:2 [1991-1992], 20). I am suggesting that, in addition to the methodological tenacity Sanders appropriately calls for, Polanyi also supports the notion of a methodological openness to the full range of potential evidence even as one does not flinch in the face of a few initial anomalies. The burden of deciding when to sustain one’s belief and when to break out is finally a matter of personal judgment. Polanyi asserts that “we must accredit our own judgment as the paramount arbiter of all our intellectual performances” (PK 265—see Diane Yeager’s fine article on this topic: “The Deliberate Holding of Unproven Beliefs’: Judgment Post-Critically Considered,” *The Political Science Reviewer* 37 [2008], 96-121).

¹⁷Grene’s perplexing rejection of the treacherous footnote stands in contrast to her usual understanding of the need to accept the contingencies of one’s calling and act with universal intent as a critic on behalf of what one sincerely believes. For instance, she states that “as long as we see that we are truly acting our way, affirming our standards with universal intent, we may both understand others, up to a point, and look at their practices critically from the position that we do in all honesty accept” (PT 170).

¹⁸Grene, as well as Polanyi, touches upon the usefulness of the notion of authenticity (see PT 186-187). It would seem one could be an authentic Azande as well as an authentic Westerner, and this suggests “authentic” could be usefully developed as a concept that acknowledges cultural differences without implying malignant relativism and allows for discriminations of truth without lapsing into imperialism.

¹⁹Here is Phil Mullins’ comment on the “treacherous footnote” in his thoughtful piece, “On Persons and Knowledge: Marjorie Grene and Michael Polanyi”: “To this reader Grene makes an interesting case in her careful exegesis of *Personal Knowledge* that has ferreted out this conceptual problem, but it is a case based largely on one footnote. It is a case, at best, of inconsistency . . .” (PMG 45). Yes, although perhaps the problem is not so much a matter of inconsistency, since as noted above Polanyi uses the same connotation of “subjectivity” elsewhere, but a matter of confusing equivocation in the use of the term.

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 is preferred. Because the journal serves English writers across the world, we do not require anybody’s “standard English.” Abbreviate frequently cited book titles, particularly books by Polanyi (e.g., *Personal Knowledge* becomes PK). Shorter articles (10-15 pages) are preferred, although longer manuscripts (20-24 pages) will be considered. Consistency and clear writing are expected. Manuscripts normally will be sent out for blind review. Authors are expected to provide an electronic copy as an e-mail attachment.

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