



POLANYI AND THE STUDY GROUP FOR THE UNITY OF KNOWLEDGE



Gus Breyspraak and Phil Mullins

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ABSTRACT

The Ford Foundation funded not only the important 1965 and 1966 Bowdoin College interdisciplinary conferences of the Study Group on Foundations of Cultural Unity (SGFCU), but also the many later conferences from 1967-1972 of the SGFCU successor group, the Study Group for the Unity of Knowledge (SGUK). Michael Polanyi chaired the group making these grant proposals and his cultural criticisms and his constructive post-critical philosophical ideas underlay both the SGFCU and the early SGUK programs which Ford generously supported. There is interesting Ford Foundation archival material about these grants and their programs as well as many relevant letters in the Michael Polanyi Papers. This essay focuses on Polanyi's limited role in three SGUK meetings and its decisive importance in shaping late Polanyi publications. It also traces the declining Polanyi's aspiration to work with Marjorie Grene to convene a never realized European SGUK conference (in the early seventies) that used his ideas to illumine the destruction of Europe in the twentieth century.

Our *Polanyiana* essay (Breyspraak and Mullins 2017) focused attention on Michael Polanyi's deep involvement in two Ford Foundation-funded interdisciplinary conferences which brought together, in 1965 and 1966 at Bowdoin College, an international mix of academics and artists. Although Scott and Moleski (2005, 257-261)

briefly treat these conferences, the biography does not show how important Polanyi's work on the Bowdoin conferences project was in shaping the last phase of Polanyi's work as a scholar. Nor does the Polanyi biography say enough about Polanyi's subsequent work in the Study Group for the Unity of Knowledge (hereafter SGUK), which was a successor, multi-year Ford-funded interdisciplinary project that Polanyi helped launch and in which he participated in limited but important ways. Like the earlier Bowdoin conferences, Polanyi's work for the SGUK had a significant influence on Polanyi's late interests and scholarship. This essay discusses Polanyi's involvement in the SGUK, showing both how the SGUK was initially grounded in Polanyi's ideas and how SGUK programs shaped some important late Polanyi publications and led toward Polanyi's Meaning Lectures delivered in 1969, 1970 and 1971 and the book *Meaning*. We discuss Polanyi's urgent but failing effort, with the help of Marjorie Grene, to put together a European SGUK meeting in 1971, which was to engage intellectuals in a wide-ranging discussion of Polanyi's account of modern history and "moral inversion."

A Prelude: Polanyi and the Study Group on Foundations of Cultural Unity

The Ford-funded project sponsoring the 1965 and 1966 Bowdoin College conferences was an experimental endeavor in which Ford and the conference organizers sought to transform the mainstream intellectual ethos, using Michael Polanyi's philosophical ideas as a catalyst. The project posited an emerging "unsuspected convergence of ideas separately developed in various fields... [by a variety of persons who should be brought together in a meeting since they all] actively oppose in their work the scientism, and the related methodological and ontological over-simplifications, which in one or another form are ascendant in every field of scholarly and creative endeavor" (Appendix A, Ford 6500113).¹ This Ford project thus began as a deliberate attempt to encourage an intellectual "movement"—a term used throughout the project correspondence—based in Polanyi's thought, but which would galvanize "convergent" voices.

The Bowdoin conferences project was organized by the Study Group on Foundations of Cultural Unity (hereafter SGFCU), which was chaired by Michael Polanyi and included Marjorie Grene and Eduard Pols as members of the organizing committee. There are extensive Ford Foundation archival records as well as much archival material in the Polanyi-Grene correspondence in the Michael Polanyi Papers (hereafter MPP) that provide detailed information about the 1965 and 1966 conferences as well as the successor SGUK meetings. Our *Polanyiana* essay treats Polanyi's key role in the 1965 and 1966 conferences. In collaboration with several others, but particularly Grene and Sigmund Koch, Polanyi initiated discussion about the SGFCU project in 1963 and 1964. Koch was, during Polanyi's spring 1964 Duke residency, a Duke faculty member with whom Polanyi was already acquainted and with whom

he apparently had conversations. In October, 1964, he took a new job as Director of Humanities and Arts program at the Ford Foundation. Koch was deeply involved in planning the SGFCU project (and later was involved in both the 1965 and 1966 conferences) and it was the Humanities and Arts program that funded the 1965 conference in January 1965 (\$25,000) and “extended” the grant (\$36,000) for the 1966 conference. Although Koch was instrumental in securing Ford support for this project, it is clear that Grene was the force on the ground, conceiving, drafting the proposal for and implementing, in close collaboration with Polanyi, the SGFCU project. This project, as the Ford materials and correspondence with Polanyi show, in many ways is simply one more incidence of Polanyi’s fruitful collaboration, after 1950, with the Grene whirlwind.

Initiation of the Continuing Project with a Re-named, Re-organized, Re-located Group

After the August 1966 SGFCU Bowdoin conference, the SGFCU was re-organized and re-named the SGUK, with Marjorie Grene as the principal investigator. The SGUK received a five-year (1967-1972) \$220,000 Ford Foundation grant (Ford 6700128) in January 1967. This large, multi-year grant was apparently made because Ford was generally pleased with the experimental SGFCU Bowdoin conferences and wished to continue the experiment with some modifications.

Sigmund Koch continued in his role as Director of Humanities and Arts program at Ford at the time the new grant application was submitted. Koch had already been deeply involved in the SGFCU and is listed as attending three SGUK meetings up through March 1969. He left the Ford Foundation not long into the five-year tenure of the SGUK for a position at the University of Texas, Austin, but was officially added to the SGUK core group and its steering committee (see Grene’s Ford Narrative Report, March, 1, 1967-March 1, 1968, pp. 2-3). But Koch eventually resigned from the steering committee after one of the squabbles about SGUK meeting topics among the members of the steering committee (see discussion below).

The cover letter accompanying the SGUK grant proposal (Grene to Koch, November 9, 1966, Ford 6700128) was signed by Grene and included the names of Polanyi (listed as Chairman) and Pols, identified as the “original organizing committee” of the SGFCU. The letter suggests the original organizing committee proposed changing the SGFCU project name to “Study Group on the Unity of Knowledge” subject to the approval by the “expanded committee.” Ten names were listed (including Grene, Polanyi and Pols) as those to be included on the “expanded Organizing Committee.” All of those listed except two were people who participated in the SGFCU Bowdoin conferences, but eventually the SGUK membership was expanded to about twenty and did include several who had not been involved in the SGFCU. Grene’s letter suggested

that “at least five and at most seven of the committee members would be active in organizing a given meeting.” Effectively, this steering committee made program decisions and eventually there was much conflict between factions of the steering committee.

The SGUK project moved its institutional center of operations from Bowdoin College to the University of California, Davis, when Grene took a faculty position at Davis in 1967. The SGUK grant application is actually co-signed by UC Davis officials. Grene was the force behind the scenes pushing for this move, but Polanyi and Koch were the figures who made the public case for this move, despite opposition from Pols and Bowdoin College. George Gale, a Davis graduate student who worked with Grene, was hired in 1967 as the project administrator with a central office at Davis; the relatively successful effort of the SGUK to organize and coordinate its many small and large conferences over five years owed much to Gale’s skill. Grene seems, above all else to have liked and gotten along well with Gale who was, according to Gale, the only student whose Ph.D. dissertation she ever directed.² Grene’s correspondence with Polanyi late in the life of the SGUK, clearly shows she became quite weary of her difficult role as principal investigator. She had many other responsibilities and also at times was seriously squabbling with Davis colleagues as well as having great difficulty working with the fractious SGUK steering committee. She took steps to move the project from UC, Davis to Boston University where it would be directed by Robert Cohen and Marx Wartofsky. But Ford would not allow this transfer of leadership and institutional sponsorship so Grene continued as principal investigator, although Cohen and Wartofsky did organize some of the later SGUK meetings.

The Presumed Polanyian Framework

Clearly, the SGUK began as a re-modeled version of the SGFCU, trading on its connections, good record, and prestige, with the Ford Foundation. Polanyi’s backing was important; at least some at Ford still in 1970 regarded the SGUK as “the Polanyi Project” (Lowry to Pols, 5 June 1970, Ford 6700128).

Polanyi’s general outline of modern intellectual history is presumed in the SGUK grant proposal. Polanyi’s cultural criticism and his alternative “post-critical” philosophical ideas are highlighted in early correspondence about a possible SGFCU grant. They are an easily recognizable backdrop in the 1965 SGFCU grant proposal and they remain the backdrop for the later SGUK grant.

The SGFCU Ford proposal identifies the misguided “ideal” that emerged in Western culture after the seventeenth century, an ideal which “carries with it a new conception of the nature of things: all things whatsoever are held to be intelligible ultimately in terms of the laws of inanimate nature.” This “reductionist program” has made anomalies of “the finalistic nature of living beings, the sentience of animals and their intelligence, the responsible choices of man, his moral and aesthetic ideals, [and]

the fact of human greatness.” The existence of these anomalies and “even the existence of science itself—has no legitimate grounds; our deepest convictions lack all theoretical foundation” (Appendix A, Ford 6500113).

The SGUK grant proposal simply presumes this basic Polanyian framework and indicates, in Grene’s November 9, 1966 introductory letter (Ford 6700128), that a new grant to the SGUK would “continue the work begun by the Study Group during its previous meetings at Bowdoin College in 1965 and 1966.” The internal Ford Foundation document evaluating the grant request spends two pages commenting on the Bowdoin conferences and then notes that the SGUK proposal is simply a reapplication “for the type of continuing support it [SGFCU] had sought from the beginning” (p. 4, internal Ford document commenting on SGUK proposal titled “Grant Request-Division of Humanities and the Arts” dated January 19, 1967, Ford 6700128).

Projected SGUK Meetings and Topics

Grene’s November 9, 1966 introductory letter and the grant proposal (Ford 6700128) outline a general plan to sponsor interdisciplinary conferences, large and small (called “major” and smaller “regional” or, in later narrative reports, “exploratory”) which treated important intellectual issues of the day which are identified in Grene’s letter as “of common interest to our participants.” Neither Grene’s introductory letter nor the grant proposal do more than suggest what in fact the meeting topics might be.

Grene’s letter suggests that meetings (at least the “major” ones at intervals of 18 months) will be “a further series” which focuses on “some of the problems which the previous meetings have shown to be in need of further discussion on an interdisciplinary basis.” She identified the next conference in March 1968 as dealing “with the relation of biology and physics, a problem raised in Professor Commoner’s paper of 1966 and the lively and complex discussion which followed it.” In fact, Commoner’s paper had been roundly attacked by Polanyi who raised the question as to whether Commoner (and others) properly understood reducibility and levels in biology (see the discussion below). Grene also suggested that a conference in the winter of 1969-70 “might deal with the problem of meaning as it arises in philosophy, the arts, and the biological and behavior sciences.”

The grant proposal itself provided a list of eight possible future topics for meetings: (1) “Relations between Physics and Biology: Identity, Complementarity, or Hierarchy?” (2) “The Nature and Function of Models in the Behavioral Sciences.” (3) “The Psychology and Epistemology of Imagination.” (4) “Meaning in Language and Art.” (5) “Patterns of Discovery in Art and Sciences.” (6) “The Cultural Implications of Cybernetics.” (7) “Taste and Morality: The Ethical Use and Abuse of Art.” (8) “Ethical Relativism and the Natural Law Tradition.” (Appendix A, Ford 6700128).

Polanyi's Participation in the SGUK: An Introduction

Although we believe it is an important topic for mid-century intellectual history, we will not attempt here to discuss the broader and evolving SGUK program which sponsored approximately twenty meetings from 1967-1972. The balance of this essay focuses only on Polanyi's participation in the SGUK; his direct involvement was limited to three SGUK meetings in 1968 and 1969. Nevertheless, the major publication of the SGUK was a Grene-edited collection of eight essays, *Interpretations of Life and Mind: Essays around the Problem of Reduction* (Grene, 1971), which was presented to Polanyi for his eightieth birthday 11 March 1971 (see Grene, 1971, p. v). Polanyi may have planned to attend other SGUK meetings but could not because of his wife's or his own health problems. We emphasize here that Polanyi very much wished to convene a European SGUK meeting on "The Effect of the Scientific Outlook on History" (as he described it—see the discussion below) in 1971, but this meeting never came together. The Polanyi-Grene letters (treated below) shed light on why this was the case.

Although Polanyi's direct personal participation in SGUK events was limited, he did, as the SGUK letterhead reflects, remain officially a member of the SGUK and received official communications from Grene (as PI) and George Gale (as administrator) about SGUK events and business. In addition, Polanyi's personal correspondence with Grene provided him (as well as Breytspraak and Mullins) with interesting details—a Grene's eye view—about SGUK affairs. There are approximately 350 pieces in the Grene-Polanyi collection in Box 16, Folders 1-9 of the MPP and clearly this is an incomplete record. At least 200 personal letters were written between the fall of 1966 and the end of 1972 (i.e., the period of the SGUK application and funded operations) and many of these mention details about SGUK. In some cases, Grene's letters provide a candid camera view of particular SGUK programs or issues, a view which is in some tension with the annual narrative reports and other materials in the Ford Foundation archives for the SGUK grant.

In three subsections below, we discuss what the Grene-Polanyi correspondence and Ford Foundation archival records suggest about the three SGUK meetings in which Polanyi was involved.

The Austin, TX, April 1968 Meeting

On April 20 and 21, 1968, there was a SGUK meeting discussing "The (Ir)reducibility of Biology to Physics and Chemistry" at the University of Texas, Austin (Grene, 1971, xii). Polanyi attended this meeting, but his connection with the meeting is an odd and convoluted one. He seems originally not to have been intended as a presenter, although one of his papers (see discussion below) apparently, at the last minute, was circulated by Grene. Grene invited papers on the topic from Michael Watanabe (a

physicist) and Francisco Ayala (a biologist). The Ford narrative report (March 1, 1968-February 28, 1969, p. 2, Grant 6700128,) indicates papers were sharply criticized by Ilya Prigogine and Alasdair MacIntyre. Prigogine (who became thereafter a SGUK member) outlined his research which today is regarded as working out the basic ideas about self-organization in dynamic systems theory. The Ford narrative report notes his “illuminating presentation” showing that “biological phenomena can in fact be explained, not by means of orthodox thermodynamical concepts, but by reference to the principles and experimental techniques of irreversible thermodynamics” (p. 2). This is covered in Prigogine’s essay, “Unity of Physical Laws and Levels of Description,” in Grene’s SGUK volume, *Interpretations of Life and Mind, Essays around the Problem of Reduction* (Grene, 1971, 1-13). In *PK*, Polanyi notes his interest in literature comparing living beings to “open systems” and he cites approvingly early work in which Prigogine was involved in the forties (*PK*, 384, note 1) on this topic. Polanyi may have had a hand in suggesting Prigogine (who was spending some time at the University of Texas, Austin in this period) be invited to this meeting. Comments in some of Grene’s letters suggest that she is relying on Polanyi to understand the chemistry and physics in Prigogine’s presentation. The Ford report suggests the views of the primary presenters at the Austin meeting were sharply criticized (apparently for their mechanistic ideas) by the philosophers, but Polanyi’s views per se are not mentioned in the Ford report (p. 3).

The April 1968 Austin meeting’s topic (mentioned as a projected topic in the original SGUK grant proposal), in fact grew out of the 1966 SGFCU Bowdoin College meeting at which there was a great dispute over the biologist Barry Commoner’s paper, “Is Biology A Molecular Science?”, which is included in Grene’s volume, *The Anatomy of Knowledge* (Grene, 1969a, 73-102), which included some of the papers from the 1965 and 1966 conferences. Polanyi strenuously contended that Commoner misunderstood reducibility and irreducibility. Polanyi subsequently wrote two theoretical biology-related essays which clearly grew out of the 1966 Bowdoin discussion. “Life Transcending Physics and Chemistry” was published in the August 21, 1967 issue of *Chemistry and Engineering News* (Polanyi, 1967) and “Life’s Irreducible Structure,” a revision and expansion of the earlier essay, was published in 1968 in *Science* (Polanyi, 1968). Polanyi’s first attempt publicly to respond to Commoner was a May 31, 1967 presentation at the Center for Theology and Science in Chicago; subsequently, he made another presentation in a general symposium of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) on December 30, 1967 at Rockefeller University in New York City, which included Gerald Holton, Ernest Nagel, John R. Platt, and Barry Commoner in addition to Polanyi (Scott and Moleski, 2005, 268-269; *Zygon* 3[4], 442). An edited transcription of the general symposium, including Polanyi’s remarks (444-447), was published under the general title, “Do Life Processes Transcend Physics and Chemistry?” in the December 1968 issue of *Zygon* (3:4, 442-472).³ Polanyi argues

in his first essay “Life Transcending Physics and Chemistry” that “no mechanism—be it a machine or a machine-like feature of an organism—can be represented in terms of physics and chemistry” (Polanyi, 1967, 55, or see Allen, 1997, 284, which includes this essay[283-299]). This was the general position Polanyi took in the 1966 Bowdoin dispute as well as all subsequent presentations and publications. Polanyi’s AAAS presentation (apparently “On the Structure of Living Things” [Box 38, Folder 10, MPP]) was a revised form of the recently published “Life Transcending Physics and Chemistry.” He notes in a February 21, 1968 letter to Grene (Box 16, Folder 2, MPP) that he had great difficulty adding “three pages to the original text” for the AAAS presentation.

Polanyi was invited to make yet another presentation of what is very likely a further revision of “Life Transcending Physics and Chemistry” (or perhaps a revision of the AAAS presentation) in mid-March 1968 at a Rockefeller Foundation-sponsored meeting at the Bellagio villa (a plush venue loaned to certain groups for meetings) in Italy. All of these presentations and revisions *precede* the April 20-21, 1968 Austin SGUK meeting and apparently contribute to “Life’s Irreducible Structure.”

The letters Polanyi and Grene exchanged early in 1968 touch upon “Life Transcending Physics and Chemistry” (“L.T.” in these letters). When Polanyi apparently was revising the published essay (or his AAAS presentation version of it) in early 1968, presumably for the mid-March Bellagio presentation, Grene advises him (Grene to Polanyi, 8 Jan. 1968, Box 16, Folder 2, MPP) that she wants to talk to him about the essay. She and others have found the published “L. T” too long and not straightforward.

Grene did include the revised and expanded “Life’s Irreducible Structure” in her 1969 collection of Polanyi essays (Grene, 1969b, 225-240), *Knowing and Being* (hereafter *KB*). She clearly considered this revised and expanded version a better essay than “Life Transcending Physics and Chemistry.” Although Polanyi wanted both essays in *KB*, Grene refused to do this since there is overlap and since the earlier essay was, in Grene’s view, obscurely organized. In *KB*, the first endnote for “Life’s Irreducible Structure” (Grene, 1969b, 239) identifies the essay as an expanded version of Polanyi’s contribution to the December 30, 1967 AAAS symposium. The note also identifies the first half of “Life’s Irreducible Structure” as “anticipated” in the August 1967 essay “Life Transcending Physics and Chemistry” published in *Chemical and Engineering News*.

Although Grene liked “Life’s Irreducible Structure” better than its predecessor, she, nevertheless, offered sharp criticisms. In her March 13, 1968 letter to Polanyi, she comments on the essay:

I think we’re on very shaky ground in our criticisms of evolutionary theory and that you must produce much better arguments than you have done so far. They [mainstream evolutionary theory] are confused but so are we. For example, that higher principles can

gradually die away doesn't prove that they can't gradually appear, just in terms of variation and selection. Nor does it prove anything about how they originate (Box 16, Folder 2, MPP).

Greene suggests some passages in "Life's Irreducible Structure" are very doubtful and she wanted carefully to go over the essay with Polanyi "before circulating it to the study group—in that case we might have to circulate it at or after the Austin meeting" (Box 16, Folder 2, MPP). Greene thus seems to have planned to include, at some point, Polanyi's "Life's Irreducible Structure" as a paper that might have been useful to the SGUK's consideration of the topic of "(ir) reducibility in biology."

Greene's letter goes on to review how much material is already to be considered at the April 1968 Austin meeting. But then she pencils in the margin of her March 13 typewritten letter, "PS The Ayala paper is so bad, I have to circulate your new one—with some misgivings and a few editings—hope you don't mind" (Box 16, Folder 2, MPP). In a March 21, 1968 letter from Polanyi to Greene Polanyi replied, "I am glad you will circulate my new paper. It should be marked Draft (Deadline April 25). Please revise what you think necessary. thanks in advance" (Box 16, Folder 2, MPP). Although Polanyi seems to have agreed that his essay could be circulated before or after the meeting, in the Ford narrative report commenting on the Austin meeting, there is no mention of Polanyi's paper.

The Villa Serbelloni, Bellagio, Italy Meeting in Late July and Early August, 1968

There was a small SGUK meeting from July 28 through August 3, 1968 on the topic "Art and Perception" at the Rockefeller Foundation villa in Bellagio, Italy at which Polanyi made a presentation. Greene convinced the Rockefeller Foundation to provide this exclusive villa for an SGUK meeting for twelve people. In many ways, this SGUK meeting, like the April 1968 Austin meeting, grew out of an earlier SGFCU meeting, in this case the 1965 Bowdoin meeting.

As the title "The Creative Imagination" implies, Polanyi's paper used to open the 1965 Bowdoin SGFCU conference emphasizes the importance of imagination in promoting scientific discovery. This paper was published (with edited discussion) in the Greene-edited 1969 monograph, *Toward a Unity of Knowledge*, which includes a selection of essays and edited discussion of these essays from the 1965 conference (Greene, 1969c, 53-91). Polanyi's essay was also published in other places in 1966, 1967 and 1968, plus a version was used as Polanyi's third fall of 1965 Wesleyan Lecture. "The Creative Imagination" is a first step on the way to Polanyi's later efforts to analyze how imagination plays a special role in making possible meaning in works of art and, ultimately, in symbol, myth, ritual and religion. Polanyi's work on imagination in the 1965 Bowdoin conference is amplified in his 1968 Bellagio SGUK conference presentation on painting.

Other 1965 Bowdoin papers perhaps complemented Polanyi's interest in imagination. Donald Weismann's paper on collage emphasized "the kind of integration of incompatibles that typifies the achievements of art as well as science" (1965 Ford Narrative Report, 8, Ford 6500113) and Polanyi later develops an interest in the incompatibility of particulars in works of art. Polanyi likely was particularly impressed with M. H Pirenne's 1965 Bowdoin conference presentation. Pirenne set forth ideas "about the philosophical applications of visual perception" (1965 Ford Narrative Report, 7, Ford 6500113), illustrated by using slides of a Pozzo painting on the concave ceiling of a baroque church, which produced an optical illusion. A Polanyi letter from October 1963 (Polanyi to Coghill, October 22, 1963, Box 6, Folder 4, MPP) confirms that Polanyi already was interested in some of Pirenne's work on optics and art and its connection with Polanyi's epistemic ideas; this is likely how Pirenne came to be invited to the 1965 Bowdoin conference to make a presentation.

Soon after the Bellagio meeting, Grene candidly told Polanyi that she thought Pirenne's 1965 presentation was "appalling" (26 August 1968, Box 16, Folder 3, MPP). She berated Polanyi for writing a preface to a Pirenne book (28 October 1968, Box 16, Folder 3, MPP), and later she noted she thought he "grossly overrate[d]" Pirenne (2 Feb. 1970, Box 16, Folder 5, MPP). Nevertheless, in part because Polanyi seems to have been captivated by Pirenne's work, it seems likely that Polanyi encouraged Grene to put together the 1968 SGUK Bellagio meeting on art and perception, which was a meeting that brought together Richard Gregory, Rudolf Arnheim, Ernest Gombrich, Iris Murdoch and others. Clearly, the nature of perception and the views of some of these figures were also of interest to Grene (see Grene, 1990, 17-22). Polanyi borrowed slides from Pirenne (Pirenne to Polanyi, 17 July 1968 and Polanyi to Pirenne, 19 July 1968 Box 7, Folder 2, MPP) which he used in his Bellagio SGUK presentation which is apparently what is published in 1970 as "What is a Painting?" (Polanyi, 1970b).

By late 1968 or early 1969, according to Prosch (Polanyi and Prosch, 1975, ix), Polanyi is working on his *Meaning* material, which, we suggest, at least in part grows out of his SGUK work on imagination and painting. Polanyi delivers lectures and holds classes on his *Meaning* material at the University of Chicago and the University of Texas in 1969, 1970 and 1971 (and possibly in 1968 also). Eventually, parts of this material are pulled together (with some excerpts from earlier Polanyi writing and bridge material provided by Prosch [Polanyi and Prosch, 1975, 227-228]) and published as *Meaning* in 1975, Polanyi's last book, co-authored with Prosch. See the Moleski and Mullins discussion (2005: 8-24) in *Tradition and Discovery*, following Prosch's death, for an effort to piece together the chaotic story of Prosch's effort to work with the increasingly mentally fragile Polanyi.

The Austin, TX Meeting on March 29-30, 1969

Polanyi was apparently in Texas possibly to give his Meaning Lectures and he also participated in the SGUK March 29-30, 1969 meeting on “Scientific Knowledge and Discovery.” Grene’s Ford report says about the meeting,

Robert Cohen opened the discussion on Saturday of Michael Polanyi’s theory of heuristics and of scientific knowledge in general, and Keith Gunderson opened a discussion in defense of the logical reconstruction approach...We felt that this weekend’s talk had opened a number of questions which ought to be carried further, and so we held a second meeting on this general theme at Boston in October, 1969 (Ford Narrative Report 1969-70, pp.1-2, Ford 6700128).

What Polanyi and Grene’s letters following the meeting reflect is Polanyi’s waning interest and energy:

I am getting a bit doubtful whether to attend the meeting of the Study Group in October. On second thought I find none of the questions or remarks at the Austin meeting to have been of use to me. Such a meeting exhausts me without corresponding benefits. And in any case this kind of discussion can be conducted more freely and effectively in my absence” (Polanyi to Grene, June 10, 1969, Box 16, Folder 4, MPP).

Polanyi did not go to the October Boston meeting or any later SGUK meetings. As to the Boston meeting, Grene assured Polanyi that Rom Harre who was very keen on Polanyi’s ideas would go to the Boston meeting and could represent Polanyi well. She agreed with Polanyi that his presence might impede discussion. The narrative report on the Boston meeting reports that Harre “presented some aspects of his own view rather than continuing the discussion of the problem of heuristics as it had been opened at Austin” (Ford Narrative Report 1969-70, p.2, Grant 6700128). Grene acknowledged this was a side issue rather than the original theme; she suggested a future SGUK meeting might return to Polanyi’s heuristics and noted that Cohen was writing a paper about the problems of scientific discovery “and its relation to other imaginative activities, with the question of the reducibility of biological and social sciences to physics...” (Ford Narrative Report 1969-70, p.2, Grant 6700128). That Cohen essay is apparently Cohen’s “Tacit, Social and Hopeful” in *Interpretations of Life and Mind, Essays around the Problem of Reduction* (Grene, 1971, 137-149). When Polanyi read the volume in

1971, he commented to Grene about how much he liked the Cohen essay (Polanyi to Grene, 30 Sept. 1971, Box 16, Folder 6, MPP).

Polanyi's Uneasy "Fit" in the SGUK

The Polanyi-Grene correspondence is a large but incomplete correspondence stretching over several years. It reads a bit like pieces of a strange mystery novel with many intricate details but much missing; some of what is missing is suggested in the annual reports to the Ford Foundation on SGUK activities. Together the letters and Ford documents reveal some important things about Polanyi and Grene in the late sixties and early seventies, as well as the way the SGUK developed and left Polanyi behind.

Polanyi's June 10, 1969 letter to Grene quoted above makes clear that Polanyi did not find the March 29-30, 1969 meeting on "Scientific Knowledge and Discovery" very fruitful and that he recognized his own increasing frailty and that he had other projects into which he wished to put his energy; he declined to attend the follow-up Boston meeting in the fall of 1969. There are signs, however, well before mid-1969 that Polanyi's "fit" in the SGUK was an uneasy fit—at least this is the case if you compare his fit to the Polanyi-Grene symbiosis of the SGFCU and Polanyi's centrality to the two Bowdoin conferences.

In early 1968, Polanyi wrote George Gale to inquire about starting a study group in Europe affiliated with the SGUK. He apparently asked Gale to send him some materials, which Gale did, but Gale also advised Grene about Polanyi's inquiry. On Feb 9, 1968, Grene wrote Polanyi that Gale had advised her Polanyi was interested in starting "a European (or British) branch of the Study Group:"

This seems a sound idea, but please do remember that, although I agree with you that any member ought to be able to propose and organise a regional meeting, the establishment of an affiliated group would be very much something else again and could not possibly be carried out without the approval of the steering committee and of the group as a whole (Box 16, Folder 2).

It is unclear whether Polanyi wished to organize a regional SGUK meeting outside the US (which involved more Europeans) or whether he hoped to start another group. It seems likely that Polanyi did not understand the terms of the Ford Foundation grant. George Gale noted that Polanyi was "for the most part simply oblivious to the bureaucratic ins and outs of the Study Group's functioning" (Gale e-mail to Breyspraak and Mullins, 27 May 2018).

What is clear is that Grene was worried that Polanyi was taking steps which might publicize the SGUK and Polanyi's role in the SGUK in a way likely to get her into difficulty with the SGUK steering committee and the larger SGUK membership:

Moreover, your TES [TLS—Times Literary Supplement] man is, in my view, a very weak reed on which to hang such an enterprise. And further, whatever you do, please do not allow him to print anything about us without clearing it with me! Otherwise we'll have another write-up of this as a movement to spread the Polanyian gospel and I'll be in hot water all over the place. However devoutly I may happen myself to subscribe to the principles of your philosophy (some of them), I do operate on the thesis that "not Socrates but the truth shall prevail." If you are right we'll discover it sometime ("we" as distinct from "I," but let us get there at our own pace in our own way.

Later in her letter, she apologizes for what she terms her (above) "tirade" and she notes "to put the matter at its most subjective: having just got over two rows, I'd like to avoid another if I can." She also reports that Jacob Bronowski has resigned from the SGUK steering committee.

In her February 15, 1968 letter to Polanyi, Grene laments that Gale sent materials to Polanyi without consulting her: "If he [the TLS man] writes us up I'm sure I'll be in for still another row—oh dear" (Box 16, Folder 2). What all this seems to suggest is that the SGUK steering committee, even in early 1968, is a fractious group. Polanyi's role, his connection with Grene and perhaps what we dubbed above the "Polanyian framework" (underlying the SGFCU and the later SGUK grant) were matters Grene was sensitive about in the context of the steering committee making programming decisions. She also clearly feared publicity identifying the SGUK with Polanyi. The TES [TLS] man who Grene regarded as a weak reed was Walter James, a British journalist (Polanyi to Gale, 21 February 1968, Box 16, Folder 2) who Polanyi had earlier worked with. Polanyi's response to Grene's February 9 letter sought to reassure Grene, but what he said is itself puzzling:

Do not worry about the speculative discussion of a European branch of the Study Group. This is merely an exercise in propaganda with a view to the interest of a foundation which is supporting my work. Should, contrary to expectation, something actually develop in this direction, I shall draw you in well in time (16 February 1968, Box 16, Folder 2, MPP).

It is worth noting that about fifteen months later, Polanyi did write Shepard Stone (10 June 1969, Box 7 Folder 12, MPP), who formerly was affiliated with the Ford

Foundation and who became the President of Association International pour la Liberté de la Culture, the organization that succeeded the Congress for Cultural Freedom (hereafter CCF, which was in part formerly funded by the Ford Foundation) when the CCF collapsed soon after the CIA funding of the CCF became public knowledge. Polanyi reminded Stone about the SGFCU and SGUK projects sponsored by Ford:

...a group of intellectuals, ranging from physics to poetry, are involved in this movement now. They still pursue the lines of the programme drawn up under my chairmanship. They share a sense of the cultural crisis, arising from a mechanistic conception of man, particularly in the universities from which this mentality spreads into the mass media (10 June 1969, Box 7 Folder 12, MPP).

In a somewhat indirect fashion, Polanyi asked about funding and his request seems to be an appeal to Stone as the director of the successor of the now defunct CCF whose European work needed to continue. Polanyi asked Stone if his new organization might “take some interest in the enterprise of the Study Group. So far we have done very little in Europe and the openings for it remain untouched” (10 June 1969, Box 7 Folder 12, MPP). As George Gale candidly put matters regarding what seems to have been Polanyi’s initial understanding of and continuing view of the SGUK,

Michael thought the Study Group was all about him, full stop. But of course it wasn’t. And once we got a fully functioning steering committee, with the likes of Bert Dreyfus, Chuck Taylor, and Alasdair MacIntyre (not to mention John Silber!) on it, the SG took on its own life. I don’t think Michael ever fully realized that and his participation dwindled as the grant ran on (Gale e-mail to Breyspraak and Mullins, 27 May 2018).

Polanyi also early in the life of the SGUK made proposals to Grene for additions to the SGUK membership and the steering committee but Grene seems to have rejected these out of hand: “My dear, you are wrong about Wigner—he may ‘love consciousness’ and of course he’s charming and your old friend—but he has no idea what the score is” (22 December 1968, Box 16, Folder 2). She then identifies the plurality of steering committee votes (including her own) which she foresees as against Wigner. Polanyi was also interested in adding J. C. Eccles who wrote a paper that Polanyi’s original 1968 paper “Why Did We Destroy Europe?” was intended to complement. However, Grene indicates Eccles also probably would not be approved for membership.

In mid-1968, Polanyi definitely made a proposal for a 1969 SGUK meeting, although the topic is never clearly identified. George Gale responded to the proposal suggesting a meeting on Polanyi’s proposed topic “sounds very interesting and exciting.

Marjorie has seen it and I am planning on sending it out in late August or early September to the Steering Committee for their votes. I am sure the proposal will be met with approval” (Gale to Polanyi, 12 June 1968, Box 16, Folder 3, MPP). Grene, on September 9, advised Polanyi “as to your weekend meeting, we intend to ask the steering committee’s opinion” as soon as the secretary returns to work and the steering committee is available (9 Sept. 1968, Box 16, Folder 3). On September 23, 1968, Gale advised Polanyi his proposal for a 1969 SGUK meeting had gone out and replies were coming in (Box 16, Folder 3, MPP). But Polanyi’s letter of October 26, 1968 to Grene mildly complains about the slow response to what he calls “my meeting” and asks to be advised “as quickly as possible how this matter stands” (Box 16, Folder 3, MPP). The correspondence does not clearly reflect whether Polanyi’s proposal for a 1969 meeting was approved but it seems likely. Comments in letters in this period suggest that Polanyi’s original proposal possibly morphed into the March 28-29, 1970 SGUK meeting on the topic “Psychological Models,” which Polanyi did not attend. In general, it appears that Polanyi’s role in shaping the SGUK was declining in 1968 and 1969.

It also appears that over several years of the life of the SGUK the fractious nature of the SGUK steering committee became more and more a problem. Steering committee friction started early in 1968. Polanyi was provided a Grene’s-eye view of the steering committee conflict in letters, but he seems to have tried to stay out of the conflict, although it may have affected responses to Polanyi’s input. In a February 28, 1968 letter, Grene tells Polanyi, “Dreyfus has been put on the steering committee [at the February 1968 Montreal meeting] (over the dead bodies of Koch and Silber who are furious)” (Box 16, Folder 2, MPP). In August of 1969, John Silber, a University of Texas, Austin philosopher who had become a dean and was a member of the steering committee, proposed at a steering committee meeting three future SGUK meetings on behalf of four or five members of the SGUK (including Texas colleagues Koch and Weismann). These topics were “The End of Art,” “Man and the Environment” and the “Problem of the Universities” and Grene’s notes (Box 16, Folder 4, MPP) on the steering committee meeting imply that things are now moving forward toward putting together meetings on these topics which will help to complete the programming of the final years of the SGUK. In her Sept. 3, 1969 letter she confides to Polanyi (Box 16, Folder 4, MPP) that she regards Silber as a bully who is likely to poison the SGUK project by complaining to figures like Koch, who is now his colleague. Grene’s later October 27, 1969 memo to the full membership advises that at a recent October 1969 meeting of the SGUK in Boston the full membership suggested it “would like to be consulted about the further planning of our meetings once we have the outlines of a plan before us...” (Box 16, Folder 4, MPP). Silber and others who earlier in August had proposed SGUK programming take the plan to have a full membership review as a Grene move to eliminate their program proposals. Silber resigned from the steering

committee and there was apparently a dramatic verbal altercation at a meeting. His fiery letter of resignation (Silber to Grene, 16 December 1969, Box 16, Folder 4, MPP) indicates that he resented Grene's accusations of a "Texas take-over" and that she and others were manipulating programming. He regarded the SGUK programming as lacking in creativity and favoring steering committee members like Dreyfus who will yet again be "flogging the computer problem at another meeting." Koch, Arrowsmith and Weismann also soon resigned. This great conflagration almost fifty years ago has today a somewhat comical aspect and it likely will to be regarded as academic politics as usual. But it also perhaps suggests some of the reasons that Polanyi kept his distance from the SGUK.

The Planning for and Demise of the August 1971 Meeting in Europe

What follows is the outline of the unfolding narrative revealed in the Grene-Polanyi letters about the effort to pull together a European SGUK meeting that apparently at one point was projected to occur in August 1971. The letters tell a reasonably clear story reflecting Polanyi's great hope for this European meeting and Grene's early work to support Polanyi in putting this meeting together followed by what seems to be something like a Grene nervous breakdown about the SGUK and ineffectual later efforts to come up with a way to put together Polanyi's European meeting. Not only does Grene's energy for putting together this meeting flag; she seems to acknowledge that her understanding of why Polanyi wished to have this meeting was limited. Grene was Polanyi's most intimate intellectual companion but she seems by this stage of her own life to have turned away from Polanyi's late emphasis on modern history and moral inversion.

On February 27, 1970, Polanyi wrote to Grene straightforwardly asking to convene a European meeting of the SGUK, apparently primarily involving British and Continental scholars interested in Polanyi's writings:

I would like you to consider that I am now in touch with a number of people in England and on the continent of Europe who are interested in the kind of problems my writings have aroused. Your own writings reach out further on the Continent than mind do. So I would like to be given authority to convene one of our week-end meetings, or perhaps even a larger one, on some subjects which I would like to explore (Box 16, Folder 5, MPP).

In a March 27, 1970 letter, Grene advised Polanyi (Box 16, Folder 5, MPP) that Edward Pols had resigned from the SGUK, that she was planning to attend a Paris meeting of the SGUK with Derrida in September 1970, and that she would "bring up the question of your European meeting" with those attending the March 28 and 29, 1970 SGUK meeting in the US. But she could not see "why there should be any

problem about it. Do you still want one? Shall I try to get Bellagio? Or will you? Or may I do so on your behalf?" In Polanyi's April 3, 1970 reply to Grene (Box 16, Folder 5, MPP), he advised he would "explain my ideas about a meeting in Europe as soon as I arrive in Chicago, which is to be on Sunday, 19th April." Later in the same letter, he identifies the length of his stay in Chicago (more than a month) and concludes "we may, in fact, arrange a meeting for preparing the European seminar." He also noted that he had finished "Science and Man" (i.e., his Nuffield Lecture delivered February 5, 1970, Polanyi, 1970a) but that he must quickly deliver the text to the Royal Society of Medicine to be printed and there was not time for Grene to scrutinize the essay.

In early July, there is a letter from William Olson, (the Rockefeller Foundation figure in charge of granting access to the Bellagio villa) to Grene (July 2, 1970, Box 16, Folder 5, MPP) advising that the Program Committee had not been provided sufficient information about a proposal for a future Bellagio meeting: "The subject is interesting but is so broad that it seems difficult to imagine much headway being made in a matter of three or four days." He also asked about planned publications from this meeting and clearly implies he thinks Grene is again representing the SGUK in requesting use of the villa (as she did for the Art and Perception SGUK meeting held there July 28 to August 3, 1968). Grene replied to Olsen four days later (July 6, 1970, Box 16, Folder 5, MPP) advising that this SGUK meeting proposal came from Polanyi and that he should write directly to Polanyi (who she was copying) "for further details." She somewhat finessed Olson's question about planned publications by discussing other SGUK publications and ended the letter noting "we do not, however, in general publish the proceedings of our discussions as such and presumably would not do so for the Science and History meeting."

It is possible that when Polanyi was in Chicago in April 1970 he and Grene had the promised discussion about his meeting which Green dubbed for Olson "the Science and History meeting" (July 6, 1970, Box 16, Folder 5, MPP). But there is not much evidence of this in the correspondence record. Grene wrote Polanyi a short note on 7 July 1970 which has the tagline "PS on the Rockefeller Stuff" (Box 16, Folder 5, MPP). This letter simply lists six names which Grene suggests Polanyi has advised are people who might be involved in a European meeting. Grene added the name Leszek Kolakowski who she thinks definitely should be interested and who will be in Oxford from October, 1970. But she ends her note oddly, commenting "Nor can I say really what you want to do."

On July 17, 1970, Polanyi wrote to Grene (Box 16, Folder 5, MPP) that he has been too exhausted to work on his projected meeting but he does provide a few relevant comments. This letter succinctly identifies the topic of the meeting as "The Effect of the Scientific Outlook on History." He notes that he has been or will be in contact with several people about this projected meeting; these included Patrick Moynihan to

whom Polanyi had sent a copy of "Science and Man" and to which Moynihan enthusiastically responded, although he did not commit to attending a meeting. He indicates he will contact Kolakowski if Grene can provide an address. Polanyi outlines his plan to distribute "Science and Man" to several people, apparently persons who might be involved in this projected meeting. Near the end of this July 17 letter, Polanyi asked Grene "please let me know what you think about the project. If you do not feel clearly in its favour, I might hesitate to pursue it further."

At the end of July, Grene sent Polanyi (28 July 1970, Box 16, Folder 5, MPP) a short letter that noted she is assuming his projected meeting is "about history in the sense of what happens and not in the sense of historiography." She is making this assumption in her effort to clarify matters for Olson to whom she is also going to send "Science and Man." Grene did take on the role, on Polanyi's behalf, of trying to place the projected meeting at Bellagio. Near the end of August, Polanyi wrote to Grene (25 August/27 August, Box 16, Folder 5, MPP) more about his contacts for the meeting. He has had discussions with at least two Polish intellectuals. Kot Jelenski, with whom he had worked earlier in the CCF, had "promised his participation and help in organizing the meeting." Polanyi had apparently drawn up a list of participants for a letter to Jelenski, but he suggested he will not approach people on the list until he hears Grene's opinion on them. The other Polish intellectual, Leszek Kolokowski, Grene had earlier recommended to Polanyi when Kolokowski was still in the US before coming to Oxford. Polanyi has now met with Kolokowski who he found receptive; he remarks about Kolokowski's writing, in this August letter to Grene, that "judging by his writings I have looked at, he seems just on the point of concentrating attention on the history of our disasters and the prospects of our hopes." He reports he has sent Kolokowski a copy of "Science and Man" so that later he can resume conversation with Kolokowski. In mid-September of 1970, Grene wrote to Polanyi (18 September 1970, Box 16, Folder 5, MPP) that she was presuming this European meeting of the SGUK would be after March 19-21, 1971 because she already had another commitment for these dates. She also asked Polanyi to provide any "more news about your proposed meeting." In a follow-up letter dated September 28, 1970 (Box 16, Folder 5, MPP), Grene reports "Bellagio turned out [us?] down, now what? Shall we give up?" She asks "what's the next thing you want me to do about your proposed spring meeting, or do you want to have it at all?" This set of Polanyi-Grene letters from July to mid-September 1970 suggests Polanyi is working toward his proposed meeting but that Grene does not seem to be altogether attentive and perhaps did not understand Polanyi's deep interest in this meeting. She likely was devoting her attention to many other things.

On October 5, 1970, Grene advised Polanyi that she has been worrying about

that spring meeting of yours, especially since the Bellagio people turned us down. Honestly, I just don't have the energy to try to

organize a meeting at some unknown place, inviting unknown people and managing the financial end without George Gale's help. In fact, I'm bone tired...[and want] very badly to get the Study Group off my hands on March first (Box 16, Folder 5, MPP).

George Gale had gone to England to study and March 1970 was the end of the SGUK fiscal year and Grene (later correspondence confirms—see below) tried to give up her role as PI and to move the SGUK project from Davis to Boston University where Robert Cohen and Marx Wartofsky would take charge for the remaining time of the grant. She advised Polanyi, “maybe the Boston people would carry on for you” and she said she will talk to them about this soon. She asked what Polanyi thought about this proposal and ends her October 5 letter on this note: “We might be able to have a summer meeting, somehow combined with one of Cohen's, but I don't know; at the moment, I just can't cope with organizing ANYTHING!!” (Box 16, Folder 5, MPP).

Two days later (7 October 1970, Box 16, Folder 5, MPP), Grene again wrote Polanyi a (typed) letter (possibly responding to a very recently received Polanyi letter lamenting his health problems) that affirmed “I too am too weary of life and administration to undertake organizing your history meeting. Possibly the Boston people would do it.” But she notes Cohen and Wartofsky are slow getting projects together and organizing Polanyi's meeting is complicated by the fact that there is no place to have the meeting: “Let's let it be for the moment in any case: ok?” In pen she added following this question in parentheses: “I'm giving up the Study Group absolutely from March!”

In mid-October (18 October 1970, Box 16, Folder 5, MPP), Grene wrote to Polanyi telling him there had been a clarification from the Ford Foundation: she had been misled earlier by a program officer. To have the SGUK grant transferred to Boston would require re-applying for the grant and Ford no longer gave grants such as the SGUK grant and “we'd probably lose the whole thing. So it seems I have to keep on with the wretched thing...as we are not spending enough money I'll have to plan your meeting—but March is impossible—we suggest late August.” She advised that Dreyfus was trying to find for “us some Norman chateau” and that she is considering a brief visit to UK in December 1970 to consult Polanyi about the meeting. Polanyi's reply to Grene a few days later (22 October 1970, Box 16, Folder 5, MPP) commented “I am happy to hear that you will take up after all the project of our meeting.” He noted a commitment August 18-26, 1971 and asked if it is possible to schedule around this and suggested that “London or perhaps Paris” would be a better site for a meeting since this could likely better accommodate Continental participants. Grene's October 28, 1970 letter (Box 16, Folder 5 MPP) to Polanyi comments “I'm glad you're glad about the meeting next summer; I am not sure whether I am or not. However, we'll try.”

In his letters late in 1970, Polanyi seems at first again to be energetically planning his meeting but then seems to have given up pressing for his meeting. On November 11, 1970 (Box 16, Folder 5, MPP), he advised Grene about his own holiday travel plans and suggested that she arrive in London around December 17 in order to “have ample time for thinking over our project.” He asked whether to include Jelenski in this meeting and noted he will in any event talk to Jelenski before meeting Grene since he values “his knowledge of Continental personnel.” But in another very brief letter to Grene about a week later (17 November 1970, Box 16, Folder 5, MPP), Polanyi wrote “I can well understand that you prefer to delay any action on the meeting I am dreaming of.” He noted that he may travel to the US in March or April 1971 and he will “keep the matter in abeyance until there is a chance to talk to you, be it here or in America.” It seems likely that Grene had written Polanyi very recently (perhaps suggesting again that putting together his meeting was going to be very difficult) and Polanyi’s letter was a response. On November 27, 1970, Polanyi wrote to Grene (Box 16, Folder 5, MPP), “I am grateful to you for your letters, even though your decisions have changed in them in response to my strange project. In a way your acceptances have been a joy, but your refusals have been almost equally refreshing to my lacking faculties.” He notes that he will definitely be coming to Austin in March, 1971, and, after a family reunion in Toronto, will spend six weeks at the University of Texas: “I trust this should give me a chance to talk to you about a number of things and clarify the project of the PLAN.” Grene’s brief November 30, 1970 reply to Polanyi (Box 16, Folder 5, MPP) notes “I didn’t know I’d been vacillating about your meeting—I suppose that’s because I really don’t know what to think about it.” This is the final comment in the Grene-Polanyi discussion of Polanyi’s meeting on the topic “The Effect of the Scientific Outlook on History.” George Gale perhaps sheds some further light on matters insofar as he has noted that Grene “simply wasn’t interested in politics, or political culture in the broad sense.” She was primarily focused on the revisioning of philosophy of science and she saw Polanyi’s thought as a key to this, but the Polanyi deeply interested in the concerns of political culture in the early and middle twentieth century she considered as no more than a “kind of Austro-Hungarian 19th C nostalgia” (Gale e-mail to Breytpraak and Mullins, 27 May 2018).

Conclusion

Our discussion focusing on the Ford Foundation funded SGUK project has emphasized how this project grew out of the 1965 and 1966 Ford funded SGFCU project sponsoring the Bowdoin College conferences. The SGFCU, organized by Polanyi, Grene, Edward Pols and a sympathetic Ford Foundation official, Sigmund Koch, attempted to use Polanyi’s account of modern intellectual history to stimulate a broader intellectual movement of convergent voices which would counter the

dominant reductionism and scientism found in many fields of inquiry in the mid-sixties. The SGUK was a project with significantly expanded funding that was initiated to extend the work of the SGFCU from 1967 to 1972 and the initial SGUK's operating model was a refashioned SGFCU model. The topics treated in some early SGUK conferences clearly grew out of matters first treated in the 1965 and 1966 conference discussions. Polanyi participated in only three of the approximately twenty SGUK conferences. Polanyi seems to have had a strong interest in the topic of these three meetings; Polanyi's writing done in connection with two of these meetings led to some of his late philosophical publications treating questions in philosophy of biology and the problems of recovering meaning in contemporary culture. Polanyi seems to have lost interest in the SGUK programs as he became increasingly frail and wanted to devote more of his energy to his final philosophical projects. The SGUK soon developed its own strong governing board and a program agenda which left Polanyi behind. The Polanyi-Grene correspondence outlines an interesting account of Polanyi's poor fit with the SGUK; it also suggests Grene's increasingly difficult problems as the SGUK principal investigator in trying to work with the members SGUK. The correspondence makes clear that Polanyi was working diligently on and had great hope for a 1971 European SGUK meeting which would re-examine his account of "moral inversion" and, more generally "The Effect of the Scientific Outlook on History." Grene assisted Polanyi in trying to put together this meeting but the many complications of setting up such a meeting—complemented by Grene's own problems and her apparently limited understanding of Polanyi's interest this topic—meant Polanyi's desired meeting never happened.

Epilogue

Part of our original interest in investigating Polanyi's focus on this 1971 SGUK meeting that was never convened was to probe the question why—given the many philosophical issues that Polanyi creatively engaged—"The Effect of the Scientific Outlook on History" was apparently his dominant concern in this last period of his productive life.

Polanyi was increasingly aware of his physical and mental failings, yet he expended his diminishing energy to address the problem captured most vividly in the pressing query in his 1970 article title "Why Did We Destroy Europe?" (Polanyi, 1970c). This theme rose to late prominence, we have concluded, because it was a query that had served as the central organizing motif of much of Polanyi's life's work.

For many, Polanyi's insights into the impact of a misconceived understanding of science on the Western imagination and civilization contribute to a larger picture painted with help from figures like Charles Taylor, Thomas Pfau, and even Zdzislaw Najder, who provided sharp criticisms of Polanyi's account of moral inversion (Najder,

1968, 364-385). But for Polanyi, the question “Why Did We Destroy Europe?” succinctly identified for him his calling. There are many supporting narratives throughout his life. As a young scientist, Polanyi wrote a letter to *Nature* affirming the value of the inexact (Polanyi, 1936/1992,, 35-36). In the same period, his work on economics education was designed to counter destructive ideas and movements he believed were bringing European disintegration. (Polanyi, 1937/2016, 18-24). His extensive involvement over many years in the programs of the CCF as well as his engagement in “neo-liberal” movements (recently documented in Beddeleem, 2019) are projects of the forties, fifties and early sixties which aimed broadly to establish a world order like the one that Polanyi associated with the fin de siècle Europe that had disappeared. The original goal of the Study Groups represents yet another iteration of his response to his calling.

Ruel Tyson’s recollection of his first conversation with Polanyi in 1956 with its focus on “moral inversion” and the “dynamic-objective coupling” (Tyson, 2006, 19) expressed this calling.⁴ Paul Craig Roberts’ response to the Scott and Moleski biography also speaks to this point:

The last 55 pages of the biography, which covers the period that corresponds with my time with Michael, passes too lightly over Michael’s concept of moral inversion. This concept was important to his thought and was a subject to which he intended to return.... Moral inversion was at the core of Michael’s understanding of the violence of the 20th century. He hoped to explain, in insightful outline, 20th century history in terms of moral inversion (Roberts, 2006, 17).

The emergence of the pointed question “Why Did We Destroy Europe?” as the dominant theme in Polanyi’s last years should not really surprise anyone. How Polanyi’s insights might address today’s “post-truth” climate with “alternative facts,” increasing general skepticism, overt attacks on science, and increasingly autocratic threats to liberal values and institutions is a milieu in which Polanyi’s insights should be central to understanding our current calling. “Why Did We Destroy Europe?” remains a central question for us some fifty years after Michael Polanyi posed this question and tried to use his failing powers to address it.

ENDNOTES

¹Most references in this essay are in parenthesis and cite archival materials for Ford Foundation grants 6500113 (funding the 1965 and 1966 Bowdoin conferences) and 6700128 covering the subsequent five-year program growing out of 6500113 (discussed below), which sponsored approximately twenty large and small conferences. When the context does not make this clear, the parenthetical reference will specify the grant number for materials quoted. There are also many parenthetical

references to archival correspondence and other materials in the Michael Polanyi Papers (MPP), Department of Special Collections, University of Chicago Library. Citations in parenthesis include writer and recipient, date, box and folder number and the abbreviation MPP. If the context makes some of these particulars of archival material clear (e.g., the writer and recipient), they are omitted from the parenthetical reference. The authors thank the Ford Foundation as well as the University of Chicago Library Department of Special Collections for assistance and permission to quote materials they hold.

²The authors interviewed George Gale on May 27, 2014 as part of the larger project of trying to understand the programs of SGFCU and the SGUK and Polanyi and Grene's roles. He also illumined his own role and advised us he had, so far as he knew, been the only Ph.D. student whose dissertation Grene sponsored. Subsequent e-mail with Gale (noted below) clarified many ambiguities.

³Remarks of all those in the symposium were published under this title in *Zygon* 3:4. Allen (1997, 299-303) republished Polanyi's comments in the AAAS symposium that were in *Zygon* (444-447) and simply used the general title for all the symposium pieces for Polanyi's component; this Polanyi essay has thus come to be known as "Do Life Processes Transcend Physics and Chemistry?"

⁴Diane Yeager's account (Yeager, 2002, 22-48) of Polanyi's ideas "moral inversion" is the most illuminating discussion that we know in the Polanyi literature.

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