The Critical Appropriation Of Our Intellectual Tradition: Toward A Dialogue Between Polanyi and Lonergan

Vincent M. Colapietro

It is especially appropriate to address in this publication questions concerning the complex relationship between religious traditions and intellectual life. Too often such traditions are still viewed as providing fixed and final answers to questions whose force and meaning do not depend on these traditions. This overvalues traditions in one respect and undervalues them in another. As a set of answers, religious traditions by themselves do not stand on their own; their deficiencies, lacunae, and errors call out for revision, development, and correction. As a set of definitive answers, religious traditions tend to be overvalued by their defenders. But as claims whose function is not to quell intellectual curiosity but to issue existential challenges,[1] it would be difficult--if not impossible--to value too highly these claims. Even so, as the conditions for radical questioning, these traditions tend to be undervalued by their detractors and even by many of their defenders.

Among the dominant images in our Enlightenment inheritance are those associated with religious persecution (e.g., Galileo brought before the Inquisition and the Massacre of St. Bartholomew). The figure and words of Voltaire epitomize the cumulative (and continuing) influence of these powerful images. When Voltaire states that "The man who says to me, `Believe as I do, or God will damn you,' will presently say, `Believe as I do, or I will assasinate you,'" we all feel the force of his words. In addition, his question is our own, "By what right could a being created free force another to think like himself?" And when he observes that "A fanaticism composed of superstition and ignorance has been the sickness of all the centuries" (quotations from Durant 1952, 237) we cannot but help feel his deep antipathy toward all forms of fanaticism, including religious fanaticism. Frequently religion is identified *tout court* with such fanaticism. The safeguard against fanaticism is, for Voltaire, the deliberate cultivation of a skeptical outlook. By their questions--their willingness to call themselves and their own traditions into question--ye shall know them; that is, ye shall be able to distinguish the humane from the intolerant.

In a recent issue of *Cross Currents* (Volume 40, Number 2 [Summer 1990]), Robert Wuthnow and Edith Wyschogrod point out, in very different ways, the *interrogative* dimension of living religiously. In "Living the Question--Evangelical Christianity and Critical Thought," Wuthnow borrows "the much-used phrase `living the question' because it seems to me that Christianity does not so much supply the learned person with answers as it does raise questions .... [Christianity] leaves people with a set of questions they cannot escape, especially when these questions face them from their earliest years" (1990, 167). Later in this article he notes that: "Lived as a question rather than a set of absolute answers, Christianity can stimulate critical thought. And in doing so, it is likely to continue bearing the burden of misunderstanding and prejudice. But that response should only galvanize its courage to tell a different story" (1990, 175). In "Works that 'Faith': The Grammar of Ethics in Judaism," Wyschogrod states that: "The contemporary situation of sacred language can be described as a change in grammatical mood (attitude indicating verb forms) from a seamless unity of the imperative and the indicative moods at the heart of action and prayer in normative Judaism, to the interrogative mood of postmodernity" (1990, 189). In the interrogative mood, our religious utterances regain their vitality and authenticity; or, they assume the form in which they are most likely to be alive and genuine

for us at this juncture in history.

I

Before reading these articles, I was already engaged in the task of trying to find my way home,[2] of forging a path back to ingenuous participation in religious practice; after encountering them, I am encouraged to continue my search. My steps have been guided by, among other authors, Bernard Lonergan and Michael Polanyi. With their help, I, too, feel not only the need but also the power to tell a story different from that of modernity, a story in which unqualified rebellion and unmoored rationality (cf. Wyschogrod 1990, 183) are themselves exposed to a hermeneutic of suspicion (Ricoeur 1970). This story concerns a crucial function our religious traditions have actually played and can still serve in our intellectual life.

At the heart of this story is the suggestion that it would be better to conceive of religious traditions in terms of questions than of answers. They make certain ways of questioning ourselves not only possible but necessary. It is legitimate to see religion as an existential answer (a response to the "mystery" of our existence). Moreover, it is also valid to see life itself as a religious question (an abyss opening in the ground beneath our feet). Indeed, only by seeing human existence as a religious question can traditional religion have the character of an existential answer. But, too often, this answer is considered exclusively as the closure of questioning. My suggestion (paralleling, it turns out, the suggestions of Wyschogrod and Wuthnow) is that my own religious tradition is best understood as a commitment or set of commitments whose value resides above all else in generating questions, not resolving them. To bind ourselves to, say, Judaism or Christianity is to commit ourselves to taking virtually everything as questionable, including the authenticity of our commitments and the adequacy of their formulation. It is to live our concrete, historical lives as inescapably problematic ventures in which the questioner and the question are one.

With respect to *both* Lonergan and Polanyi, I am not an expert but an amateur (an untutored lover or admirer). Even though I have not formally studied either of these thinkers under the direction of a teacher, I discovered both of them rather early in my intellectual career. In addition, I have been reading them, off and on, for almost two decades now. Lonergan and Polanyi are thinkers to whom I turn, again and again, in my own struggle to make sense out of my experience of our world. In other words, they are for me not so much objects of study as resources for inquiry. Of course, this distinction cannot be drawn too sharply: in order to be resources for investigation, writings or authors must be, to some extent, objects of investigation.

The point of these remarks is not to beg indulgence for misunderstanding or misusing the positions of these thinkers. It is simply to help my readers frame expectations appropriate to the discourse before them. This discourse is not so much an essay *on* Lonergan and Polanyi as it is an exploration with them. But, as you will see, their guidance is solicited almost at every turn. Indeed, the very way in which the issue is framed owes much to both authors.

II

In *The Crisis of Philosophy*, Michael McCarthy poses the question to which the remainder of this paper is devoted. As we shall see momentarily, this question finds its counterpart in Polanyi's *Personal Knowledge*. McCarthy accepts Hans-Georg Gadamer's insight that "belonging is a constitutive feature of human existence" (1990, 332). As a result, he sees that "[t]he real question is not *whether* we shall belong to a tradition but in *what manner* we shall belong." This leads him to ask: "Can we achieve a dialectic of belonging and distance, which preserves the richness of tradition but keeps us sensitive to its limits?" In a section of *Personal Knowledge* entitled "Acceptance of Calling", Polanyi calls attention to the fact that

> we are creatures of circumstance. Every mental process by which man surpasses the animals is rooted in the early apprenticeship by which the child acquires the idiom of its native community and eventually absorbs the whole cultural heritage to which it succeeds. Great pioneers may modify this idiom by their own efforts, but even their outlook will remain predominantly determined by the time and place of their origin" (1958, 322).

This requires us to acknowledge that: "Our believing is conditioned at its source by our belonging." Since the society to which we belong "allocates powers and profits," those of us who are adherents of the intellectual *status quo* are, thereby, supporters of the way powers and profits are being allocated. It should be no surprise, then, that: "Respect for tradition inevitably shields also some iniquitous social relations." The awareness of this inevitability prompts us to ask, "How can we claim to arrive at a responsible judgment with universal intent, if the conceptual framework in which we operate is borrowed from a local culture and our motives are mixed up with the forces holding on to social privilege?" One context in which such awareness is likely to generate this form of question is the academy; curricular reforms are haunted by doubts regarding local prejudices (e.g., Western or patriarchal biases) concealing themselves under universalistic rhetoric. (321-324)

One way of framing this issue is in terms of immanence and transcendence. To acknowledge that we are creatures of circumstance and also that our believing is conditioned by our belonging is to underscore our immanence in history: we are caught up in a flux over which we have only very limited control. But the very circumstances into which we have been thrown--the very communities into which we have been born--have themselves bequeathed to us an array of "transcendental precepts" (Lonergan 1985, 8) or universal principles from which it seems difficult, if not impossible, to sever allegiance. These precepts or principles are precisely what empower us to see our culture as local and some of our practices as iniquitous. In other words, they are the means by which we can transcend the contingencies of our time and place. Some thinkers stress our immanence in history to such a degree as to undermine the possibility of transcendence; other thinkers so emphasize our capacity for transcendence that they render negligible our immanence in history. In contrast to both of these types, Lonergan and Polanyi strive to give due recognition to *both* immanence and transcendence.

Closely connected with this, both desired to bring into sharp focus (in the words of the former) "the ongoing interplay in human history of tradition and innovation" (Lonergan 1985, 35). "We owe our mental existence predominantly to works of art, morality, religous worship, scientific theory, and other articulate systems [including language] which we accept as our dwelling place and the soil of our mental development" (Polanyi 1958, 286). These articulate systems are *inherited* matrices in which novel discoveries are made and novel inventions crafted. The innovative is dependent, both conceptually and existentially, on the established. The innovative is recognizable and,

indeed, possible only when measured against the established. Apart from tradition, innovation makes no sense: it is conceptually part of a contrast. Without established or traditional frameworks in which skills can be acquired and refined, no person would have the resources to be innovative.

In addition, both Lonergan and Polanyi were interested in showing that our *religious* traditions have been and must continue to be indispensable resources for intellectual innovation. They approached this task, however, in very different ways. Lonergan approached this task, first and foremost, as a member of a strongly traditional religion, while Polanyi did so as an emigre from a totalitarian country dedicated to the elimination of traditional religion. This resulted in a difference in focus: Lonergan labored strenuously to show the inadequacies of our classical inheritance, while Polanyi concentrated primarily on showing the dangers inherent in certain central features of our distinctively modern heritage. Put alternatively, Lonergan was most interested in the transition to modernity, whereas Polanyi's deepest concern in this connection was to exhibit the nihilistic tendencies inherent in a militantly secular worldview.

As a Roman Catholic priest responding to Pope John XXIII's call for *aggiornamento* within his church, Lonergan was especially concerned to convince his fellow Catholics of the necessity to make the transition from a classicist world-view to contemporary historical-mindedness (see, e.g., 1967, chapter 15 and also 1974 1-9). Specifically in reference to Thomism, he suggests that this necessary transition will involve at least five "transpositions," namely: "A Thomism for tomorrow has to move from logic to method; from science as conceived in the *Posterior Analytics* to science as it is conceived today; from the metaphysics of the soul to the self-appropriation of the subject; from an apprehension of man in terms of human nature to an apprehension of man through human history; and from first principles to transcendental method" (1975, 50). He is sensitive to the fact that "Catholic philosophy and Catholic theology are matters, not merely of revelation and faith, but also of culture. Both have been fully and deeply involved in classical culture. The breakdown of classical culture and, at least in our day, the manifest comprehensiveness and exclusiveness of modern culture confront Catholic philosophy and Catholic theology with the gravest problems, impose upon them mountainous tasks, invite them to Herculean labors" (1967, 266). He was convinced that: "Classical culture cannot be jettisoned without being replaced; and what replaces it, cannot but run counter to classical expectations." He was also convinced that: "There is bound to be formed a solid right that is determined to live in a world that no longer exists. There is [also] bound to be formed a scattered left, captivated by now this, now that new development ..." (1967, 266-7). In response to this anticipated and, indeed, encountered polarization, Lonergan advocated what might be called a centrist approach; for he believed strongly that "what will count is a perhaps not numerous center, big enough to be at home in both the old and the new, painstaking enough to work out one by one the transitions to be made, strong enough to refuse half measures and insist on complete solutions even though it has to wait" (1967, 267).

While Lonergan pointed the way beyond classicism, Polanyi sought a way beyond nihilism (see, e.g., 1969, chapter 1). For the latter, "modern nihilism is a moral excess from which we are suffering today ..." (1969, 3). He even admitted the possibility that "our passion for nihilistic self-doubt may be incurable, and it may come to and end only when it has finally destroyed our civilization." It was, indeed, this possibility that prompted him to articulate a multifaceted critique of modern nihilism.

Despite his insistence upon making the transition from classicism to modernity, Lonergan expected that there would be "a rather notable continuity" between the past and the present--in particular, between the thought of Thomas Aquinas and that of contemporary Catholics (1985, 51). As part of his critique of nihilism, Polanyi insisted that

anti-traditionalism must be shown for what it is--another tradition whose original emancipatory power has largely dissipated and, in fact, whose continuing dominance tends more and more to undermine the possibility of effective freedom. Accordingly, Lonergan's plea for the cultivation of historical-mindedness is the plea of a traditionalist, i.e., of one deeply committed to establishing a continuity between the past and the present. And Polanyi's rejection of nihilism and his recovery of tradition are the opposite sides of the same coin.

Lonergan and Polanyi were, of course, acutely aware that tradition could stifle innovation and, in turn, that innovation could discredit tradition. They were also aware that not only could the representatives of any particular historical tradition betray its own definitive norms but also that traditions themselves could violate "the immanent norms of the human spirit" (McCarthy 1990, 334; Lonergan 1967, 246). Historical consciousness brings with it the painful awareness that our religious traditions have been instruments of injustice and obstacles to truth. Moral discernment allows us to see that what has been true of the past is also true of the present: our religious traditions are, to some degree and in some ways (however subtle), inauthentic. Hence, it becomes imperative to adopt a critical stance toward the inherited framework in which we customarily dwell. But (and here the issue becomes more complex than we ordinarily suppose) the possibility of adopting such a stance depends, in part, upon the vitality of the very tradition or framework about which judgments of authenticity are being made. Put another way, we are never completely outside of the framework whose authenticity we are trying to determine. Thus, our breaking out of an inherited framework is never as thoroughgoing as is our dwelling in this framework (Polanyi 1958, 195ff). We are always still committed, in a fashion, to what we reject, no matter how vociferous and extreme is our rejection. Indeed, the more vociferous and extreme the reaction, the more we are inclined to say, "Methinks, s/he doth protest too much." What needs to be ascertained, above all else, is whether our rejection amounts to a conversion or an inversion, i.e., an espousal of norms and ideals thrusting us toward self-transcendence and self-transformation or an espousal condemning us to self-insulation and self-disfigurement (cf. Grant 1974).

In light of the above, it seems especially appropriate to take this occasion to explore, in light of Lonergan and Polanyi, the topic of tradition. In particular, I want to look at what might be called "the dialectic of fidelity and truth." By this expression, I mean the fateful way in which the acknowledgment of truth (especially novel truth) and the fidelity to tradition (especially a hoary one) are actually dependent on each other and, at the same time, potentially destructive of each other. At the heart of any dialectic is an *agon*, a potentially destructive conflict between mutually dependent factors or forces (cf. Lonergan 1957, 217). While conflict is inevitable, destruction is not. Thus, the point in speaking about a dialectic is to bring into view not the inevitablity of defeat or collapse but the inescapability of conflict and struggle. It is also to highlight the mutual dependence of inevitable antagonists.

III

It would be difficult to overestimate the role tradition plays in the acquisition of knowledge. In certain respects, virtually no one truly doubts or even could reasonably doubt this role. Who could, for example, deny that human reason, as it actually functions in a particular domain of scientific investigation, depends upon the effective transmission of what previous scientists have securely established substantively and methodologically? And what is tradition but the effective transmission from one generation to another of what has proven to be secure or reliable?

Yet the systematic disregard of an authoritative tradition is a prominent feature of *critical* philosophy in most of its influential forms. By "critical" philosophy, I mean what Michael Polanyi meant--a program beginning in universal doubt and aiming at absolute certitude and, moreover, a program in which the elimination of the personal agency of the knower is the price to be paid for the attainment of objective knowledge. In the *Advancement of Learning* (1605, Book I), Francis Bacon asserted that: "If a man will begin with certainties, he shall end in doubts; but if he will be content to begin with doubts, he will end in certainties." The willingness to begin with doubt--to call into question what others take for granted--claims to make possible the elimination of any trace of "subjective" (i.e., personal) presence. In other words, such willingness is, from this perspective, the means by which the distorting influence of human subjectivity is removed and a dispassionate view of an objective reality is secured.

It is helpful to recall that the subtitle of *Personal Knowledge* is "Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy." If the critical turn advocated by Francis Bacon, Rene Descartes, et al. began by espousing programmatic (or methodic) doubt, the first steps toward a post-critical philosophy are those by which the obstacles to accepting a fiduciary programme (Polanyi 1958, 264) are removed. While philosophy transformed itself into a *critical* enterprise by its critique of tradition, it can transcend the nihilistic implications of this transformation only by (among other things) a critique of doubt (Polanyi 1958, chapter 9; cf. Peirce 1868). In the opening paragraph to the concluding chapter of *Personal Knowledge*, Polanyi declares that the aim of this book is to re-equip persons with the faculties which centuries of critical thought have taught them to distrust (1958, 381). One of these faculties is our capacity to entrust ourselves to the authority of masters, ones who embody in an exemplary way skills of doing and knowing. In our time, not explicit doubt but tacit beliefs, not radical criticism but acritical trust, need to be accredited as the principal sources of human knowledge (see, e.g., Polanyi 1958, 266).

The shift from a critical to a post-critical philosophy can be construed as a transition from a modern to a postmodern outlook. This becomes clear when we recall that, for Polanyi,

> The critical movement, which seems to be nearing the end of its course today, was perhaps the most fruitful effort ever sustained by the human mind. The past four or five centuries, which have gradually destroyed or overshadowed the whole medieval cosmos, have enriched us mentally and morally to an extent unrivalled by any period of similar duration. But its incandescence had fed on the combustion of the Christian heritage in the oxygen of Greek rationalism, and when this fuel was exhausted the critical framework itself burnt away (1958, 265-6).

The "critical movement" is, in effect, identified with the modern period in Western culture; and the movement beyond this movement can, accordingly, be called postmodern as well as post-critical. There may be good reasons for hesitating to use "post-modern" in reference to Polanyi.

We noted earlier that it would be difficult to overestimate the role of tradition in the acquisition of knowledge. Even so, most theories of knowledge, especially modern ones, have not only underestimated this role; they have been hostile to the very idea of tradition, to the allegedly obscurantist tendency to grant authority to merely received positions. Very early in the modern (i.e., post-medieval) epoch of Western culture, both the rationalist conception of reason and the empiricist conception of experience were articulated in opposition to what was being handed down in the name of knowledge. Thus, in the writings of Da Vinci, Bacon, Galileo, Descartes, and numerous others, we encounter not only attacks on particular intellectual traditions (e.g., Aristotelianism and scholasticism) but also a

general critical assault on the very notion of an authoritative intellectual tradition (i.e., a tradition as a locus of authority). To be sure, some of these authors conceived their task to include inaugurating a tradition of their own, one in which the claims of reason or experience would take precedence over those of traditions. For example, Descartes in the *Discourse on Method* (1637, Part VI) wrote that two obstacles confronting persons who devote themselves to science are the shortness of life and the lack of experiments. He judged that "there was no better remedy against these two obstacles than faithfully to communicate to the public all the little I had found, and to urge good minds to try to go beyond this in contributing, each according to his inclination and his capacity, to the experiments which must be made, and communicating also to the public everything they learned; so that, the last beginning where their predecessors had left off, and thereby linking the lives and labours of many, we might all together go much further than each man could individually." Two points need to be stressed in connection with this defense of tradition. First, the process is to begin with Descartes, with methodic doubt and the dramatic defeat of such doubt by a disembodied, solitary theoretical consciousness who knows with absolute certainty both "I exist" and "God exists." Second, it is not clear, however, how either the rationalist conception of reason or (for that matter) the empiricist notion of experience can forge such an alliance with tradition. Does not the formation of this alliance entail a violation of the integrity of either reason, rationalistically conceived, or experience, empiricistically conceived? Is such an alliance not rather like a sexual relationship established by an erstwhile virgin? Once the relationship is established, one *is* no longer what one was.

Lonergan and Polanyi explicitly acknowledge the role of tradition in the context of inquiry. In addition, they stress the critical appropriation of an intellectual tradition as an unavoidable task confronting any responsible inquirer. By the "critical appropriation of an intellectual tradition," I mean a process of critical evaluation by which responsible subjects make their own the resources of a tradition to which they are committed and, at the same time, by which they are confused or troubled. However, such appropriation is, as both of these thinkers realize, delicate and even problematic. While the very criteria for a *critical* appropriation are often found within an intellectual tradition itself, this is not necessarily the case. Moreover, at least some intellectual traditions are defined by their openness to other intellectual traditions, however imperfectly this openness is realized in practice. Such considerations make it easy or, at least, possible to see why efforts at critical appropriation, honestly and rigorously undertaken, contain within themselves the likelihood of deracinated consciousness: the likelihood of alienation from, rather than appropriation of, one's own tradition might be the outcome of such efforts. Lonergan and Polanyi are helpful precisely because their recognition of tradition's ineliminable role in human inquiry prompts them to investigate some of the most important ways tradition operates within the context of inquiry. They are also helpful because they thematize, or make explicit, the problem of how a particular religious inheritance might be evaluated as an authoritative intellectual tradition.

Any intellectual inquiry is, at once, irreducibly personal and essentially communal. That I, as a unique, historical, embodied agent, must assume responsibility for my utterances makes inquiry irreducibly personal. That I must address these utterances to other persons--that I must appeal to others not only to assist me in verifying the truth of my claims but also to clarify the very meaning of my utterances--suggests that the inquirer is essentially a person-in-relation-to-others. To be an inquirer is to participate personally (and this means, among other things, responsibly) in a community of inquiry. Objectivism fails to do justice to the irreducibly personal dimension of human knowledge, while subjectivism overlooks the essentially communal character of human investigation. Contra objectivism, to acknowledge the ubiquitous presence of the knowing subject in any act of knowing does not entail subjectivism. Contra subjectivism, to insist upon the self's responsibility to address others and even to submit to the authority of masters does not reduce the subject to an object.

What should be controlling in any inquiry is a question or set of questions, not a text or body of writings. Of course, a text often is an exemplary case of just such an inquiry and, accordingly, an explication of the text is a re-enactment of the drama of inquiry. Polanyi's *Personal Knowledge* and Lonergan's *Insight* are themselves compelling examples of this. The question animating this investigation concerns the authority of tradition: What authority, if any, can we claim for tradition in the field of knowledge? My thesis is that, at the heart of any truly authoritative tradition, there is the power to authorize questions of an ever more comprehensive and radical cast, even questions erroneously but persuasively deemed to be foolish or nonsensical. Such a tradition is a set of largely dumb certitudes, or tacit beliefs, allowing for the possibility of articulate doubts. The sort of authority with which I am concerned is intellectual authority; and, according to my thesis, the essence of such authority resides in the heuristic power of historical traditions (those intergenerational forms from which human action and even experience, for the most part, acquire their purposes no less than their structure). There is something unquestionable about the truly authoritative traditions. But what is unquestionable about them is so only because it allows us to pose questions of progessively wider scope and deeper significance. To insist upon the unquestionable authority of an intellectual tradition is not a plea for obscurantism, though it must certainly seem so to most people today (cf. Polanyi 1958, 268). It is, in fact, just the opposite--an attempt to undercut the obscurantism destined to result from the hegemony of skepticism. In this connection, one has only to think of the concluding lines of David Hume's *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1777): "When we run over libraries, persuaded of these principles, what havoc must we make? If we take in our hand any volume; of divinity or school metaphysics, for instance; let us ask, *Does it contain any abstract reasoning concerning quantity or number?* No. *Does it contain any experimental reasoning concerning matter of fact and existence?* No. Commit it then to the flames; for it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion."

It is not incidental that the *loss* of faith in truth eventually resulted from the discrediting of the truths of faith. Nor is it incidental that the recovery of a fidelity to truth cannot ultimately be separated from a willingness to open questions of an essentially religious character (cf. Polanyi 1958, 298). In opposition to David Hume's religious skepticism, we need to pit Michael Polanyi's fideism. In opposition to Rene Descartes' methodic skepticism, we need to endorse the doubts of Lonergan as well as Polanyi about the method of doubt. For the author of *Insight*, "[u]niversal doubt leads the philosopher to reject what he is not equipped to restore. But philosophers that do not practise universal doubt are not in that predicament ..." (1957, 411). For the author of *Personal Knowledge*, "the programme of comprehensive doubt collapses and reveals by its failure the fiduciary rootedness of all rationality" (1958, 297).

IV: Language As The Paradigm Of Tradition

There is perhaps no better way of illuminating our topic, the critical appropriation of intellectual traditions, than by taking language as our paradigm of tradition (Pieper 1954). Reflection upon this paradigm allows us to see what, in general, is involved in the appropriation of a tradition, i.e., in the process by which human beings make their *own* what is initially and, to some extent, enduringly *other than* themselves (cf. Lonergan). More fundamentally, it also helps us to see what tradition is. From these general considerations, we can turn to exploring what specifically is involved in the *critical* appropriation of an *intellectual* tradition. (The term "critical" is ambiguous: it might be used to designate someting rather specific--namely, the skeptical sensibility of Enlightenment rationality--or something more general, a healthy but disciplined willingness to call into question aspects of one's inheritance.) While it might

be more precise to speak of post-critical in this connection, it might also be worthwhile to reclaim the term "critical." "Critical" need not mean what it has come to mean in the modern experiment of universal doubt, namely, a comprehensive critique of all inherited beliefs. It can signify a sensibility at once more modest and more radical, the sensibility of those who fully realize their inability to call into question the whole of their inheritance and, nonetheless, who unflinchingly accept their responsibility to question, under the actual stimulus of a specific doubt as opposed to a wholesale skepticism, *any* part of this inheritance.

I am not unmindful that treating language as our paradigm of tradition might conceal and even misrepresent the unique character of other traditions (e.g., religion). In particular, our dwelling in our native tongue does not appear to allow for as complete a breaking out of the conceptual framework provided by this linguistic inheritance as does our dwelling in our native religion (i.e., the religion into which we were born and brought up). In other words, we may be able to dissociate ourselves more thoroughly from some traditions than from others; and, since language is one from which it is ordinarily impossible to dissociate ourselves, it appears that the choice of language as a paradigm of tradition is unjustified.

In terms of what is involved in the transmission of language or speechcraft from one generation to the next, we can do no better than recall the words of Polanyi. Indeed, in the texts to be quoted, he himself clearly takes language as the paradigm of tradition. "All arts [and thus the art of speech] are learned by intelligently imitating the way they are practised by other persons in whom the learner places his confidence. To know a language is an art, carried on by tacit judgments [including unspoken trust] and the practice of unspecifiable skills" (1958, 206). "The combined action of authority and trust which underlies both the learning of language and its use of carrying messages, is a simplified instance of a process which enters the whole transmission of culture to succeeding generations" (1959, 207). "This assimiliation of great systems of articulate lore by novices of various grades is made possible only by a previous act of affiliation, by which the novice accepts apprenticeship to a community which cultivates this lore, appreciates its values and strives to act by its standards" (1958, 207). "The learner [of language or of anything else], like the discoverer, must believe before he can know" (1958, 208). Learners have no choice but to place their trust in others. "Such granting of one's personal allegiance is ... a passionate pouring of oneself into untried forms of existence. The continued transmission of articulate systems ... depends throughout on these acts of submission" (1958, 208). The person to whom such systems are transmitted is transformed in a largely irreversible way. Insofar as this process of self-transformation is informal and irreversible, it is a-critical (ibid.).

V: Two Oversimplifications

It is, however, important to warn against two oversimplifications concerning the critical appropriation of an intellectual tradition. One involves too restrictive a view of what is meant by "critical appropriation," the other too abstract a view of "intellectual tradition."

First, we should not draw too sharp or absolute a distinction between the earlier and later phases of appropriation: the appropriation of any tradition is a continuum in which there are rudimentary forms of challenge evident very early in the process of appropriation and in which there is a massive amount of unchallenged assumptions present even during those moments of the most intense, explicit critique.

Second, most traditions are complex. They are not simply nor solely *intellectual* traditions. In a rough, provisional way, we can define "intellectual" as that which is concerned with the cultivation of intelligence and, as central to this concern, is devoted to the acquisition, maintenance, and refinement of the skills needed both to "hear" again what was "spoken" earlier (cf. Gadamer) and to discover what was never known before (Lonergan). Accordingly, a tradition is "intellectual" insofar as it is concerned with the cultivation of intelligence, i.e., devoted to (among other matters) imparting, conserving, and developing skills of interpretation and inquiry.

Some traditions are not only centrally but also narrowly concerned with this task or some part of this task; others subordinate this task to other forms of practice. A particular group of scientific inquirers would be an example of the former, while a historical community of religious worshippers would be an illustration of the latter. While the subordination of this task has historically resulted in the suppression and disfigurement of intelligence, it is arguable--indeed, both Lonergan and Polanyi, in effect, argue--that such subordination can also result in the liberation and transfiguration of intelligence.

As we have already suggested, the *critical* appropriation of an intellectual tradition is evident in a rudimentary and sporadic form very early in the process of appropriation. This means that the refined and deliberate critique of such a tradition is not absolutely novel. One needs only to think of the countless and spontaneous questions asked by children as they are being initiated into a tradition. It is, consequently, a gross oversimplification to see the later phases of explicit critique as discontinuous with earlier phases. In particular, the transition should not be described as a movement from blind, uncritical acceptance to enlightened, critical assessment. To describe this transition as such a movement is a gross oversimplification.

The *intellectual* dimension of a historical tradition is, ordinarily, just that--a single (though itself inherently complex) dimension of a complex inheritance: it is not only one aspect among others but also one frequently subordinated to some other form of practice (e.g., worship in the case of certain religious communities, rights in the case of certain political traditions, civility and character in the case of certain familial traditions). In addition, those traditions which *are* predominantly intellectual--which are more or less exclusively focused on the cultivation of intelligence--are always concerned with only certain forms of intelligence and not the full array of intellectual skills needed to make sense out of our experience of the world. A possible exception to this is the traditional university. In any event, what needs to be stressed here is that the majority of our most basic traditions incorporate within themselves an intellectual dimension, but this is only a single facet of their multifaceted reality; what also needs to be emphasized is that even those traditions whose focus is predominantly "intellectual" are, with one possible exception, not *comprehensively* intellectual. It is, hence, a fundamental distortion to see all intellectual traditions (more precisely, all traditions having a significant bearing upon the cultivation of intelligence) as separable entities rather than as distinguishable aspects; moreover, it is also a basic mistake to see any particular intellectual tradition as providing a comprehensive training of human intelligence.

VI: Two Forms Of Critique

Critical appropriation is a virtually inevitable phase in one's ongoing participation in an intellectual tradition. In saying this, it is important not to fall into the very error we warned against just a moment ago--namely, conceiving the appropriation of a tradition as a movement from an uncritical, blind allegiance to a critical, enlightened assessment. There is potentially something misleading in using the expression "critical appropriation" to designate a distinctive phase or series of phases; for this use tends to underwrite the oversimplification just noted. In one sense, "critique"--the asking of questions and posing of challenges--is part and parcel of the very process of appropriation, at virtually each and every phase in this process. In another sense, it is a distinctive phase in this process. There are moments in the life of inheritors when they adopt, self-consciously and deliberately, a critical stance toward their intellectual inheritance. At such moments, persons formally and explicitly commit themselves to *either* realizing more fully the deepest imperatives of their inheritance *or* rejecting the authoritative hold of these imperatives. Persons *conscientiously* decide to continue or to resist defining themselves in accord with their upbringing.

Part and parcel of any such tradition is not only specific judgments about the world but also general criteria defining the ways specific judgments may themselves be judged in terms of meaningfulness, truth, reliability, etc. In other words, intellectual traditions provide the resources for framing reflexive judgments, judgments about judgments in one or more respects. This provision can and often does empower the adherents of a tradition to call into question the foundational truths of their particular tradition. In addition, it helps to develop in these adherents a critical sensibility open to appropriating, from other traditions, standards and ideals of judgment different from the ones these adherents inherited from their own tradition. On the one hand, then, there are criteria *within* any intellectual tradition by which the proponents can judge aspects of their own tradition. On the other, there are criteria from intellectual traditions other than one's own to which one is, nonetheless, drawn--and drawn as a result of the critical sensibility fostered by one's own actual inheritance. In either case, there is inherent in any intellectual tradition a trajectory beyond its present form.

Not only is this trajectory inherent in such traditions, but it enters in an explicit and prominent way into the consciousness and commitments of those traditions we most likely admire and advocate. We are inclined to think that the authenticity of a tradition is secured, above all else, by its openness to innovation (cf. Lonergan) and its willingness to call itself into question in ever more radical ways (i.e., to pose questions striking ever more deeply at the very roots of the tradition itself). This inclination is praiseworthy. But it does not enable us to see adequately wherein the authenticity of a tradition resides. For the willingness and, indeed, the capacity to pose questions of an ever wider scope and deeper significance depends on an unquestionable fidelity to the ideals animating or inspiring our traditional practices. It is imperative to distinguish between an unquestionable and an unquestioning allegiance. On the one hand, I might not question what is or ought to be considered questionable (e.g., the results of a scientific experiment or the statements of an elected official). On the other, I might try to question what is, in some way, beyond question, i.e., in principle beyond the possibility of being called into question. If one asserts that nothing is, in reality, beyond the possibility of being called into question, then one is, in effect, taking the very act of questioning to be unquestionable. The (unquestioned?) primacy of the interrogative mood is, as Edith Wyschogrod suggests, the characteristic mood of our postmodern day. But underlying our questions is the *imperative* to question. Just as we frequently need (as Wittgenstein recommended) to question the question, so too we often need to question the questioner (including the motives of the questioner). The hermeneutics of suspicion simply cannot stop short of self-interrogation. For this reason, the stories through which I am forced to recognize my fallibility, finitude, and fallenness are indispensable

elements in any adequate hermeneutics of suspicion.

But what are the conditions for the possibility of questioning and, more narrowly, of questioning which refuses to limit arbitrarily the scope of its field? Here it is instructive to consider the form of skepticism espoused by so many students today. They have so few questions; beyond this, they have little desire in being aroused from their skeptical slumber, from their abiding doubts about the worthwhileness of Socratic cross-examination and, more generally, rigorous questioning. In the passivity and inertness of so many of our students, we are confronted with the massive failure of our dominant intellectual traditions. The crushing of dogmatism and the cultivation of skepticism are the "truths" that were supposed to set us free to question.

The sense in which I am using the term "unquestionable" is this: we are unable to call certain things into question without thereby undermining our very capacity or willingness to pose questions. I believe in order not only that I may know but also that I might question; and I question that I might believe in the manner which does the least violence to the rational integrity of myself and others. Moreover, I question in order that I might become more fully present to and responsible for myself. While beliefs make questions possible, questions make beliefs humane. Underlying the capacity to question is the unlimited desire to know; fostering the willingness to question are the Socratic challenges of others.

VII: Conclusion

In my own life, the challenges of Michael Polanyi and Bernard Lonergan have forced me to re-open questions concerning the *arche* and *telos* of my own ability to pose questions, my own capacity to call into question the theoretical validity of inherited "truths" or moral authenticity of inherited "values." As McCarthy observes, we need to adopt both a hermeneutics of recollection and a hermeneutics of suspicion, "for every tradition contains elements worthy of retrieval and others unfit for transmission" (1990, 334). But it is crucial "to be critical about the posture of criticism itself. Hermeneutic suspicion is an ambiguous interpretive outlook, even though it has become a dominant [and perhaps even an unquestioned] stance in our intellectual culture" (ibid.). We must question where the questioner stands; we must question where we ourselves as questioners stand in our attempts to launch ever more radical critiques of our intellectual traditions. We must not be content to remind ourselves about the possibility of being allied to a tradition that is inauthentic or even iniquitous; we must also consider with genuine humility the possibility that we ourselves, in our very role as critics and questioners, are alienated from what is genuine and true (ibid.).

We need to recognize that we as questioners are always already members of a community of questions and also that this community is always in the position of allowing the fertile soil of its own critical sensibility to be ravaged by the winds of fashion and the scorching sun of uncharitable criticism. We need to recognize that our very commitment to truth--or, more precisely, the particular form this commitment has characteristically assumed during the modern period--threatens to destroy the vitality of our faith, our faith in ourselves and also in one another. "Uprootedness is," as Simone Weil has pointed out, "by far the most dangerous malady to which human societies are exposed, for it is a self-propagating one. For people who are really uprooted there remains only two possible sorts of behavior: either to fall into a spiritual lethargy resembling death ... or to hurl themselves into some form of activity necessarily designed to uproot, often by the most violent methods, those who are not yet uprooted, or only partly so"

(1952, 47). It is legitimate to ask how often *radical* critics of their own intellectual traditions are doing what Weil describes here--hurling themselves into some form of activity necessarily designed to uproot others.

When one turns from these radical critics to such critical traditionalists as Polanyi and Lonergan, one senses one is in the presence of authentic radicals. For these critical traditionalists are thinkers unwilling to restrict arbitrarily the scope of inquiry. They are willing to go to the fiduciary root of their critical sensibility.

ENDNOTES

1 In "Dogma and the Universe," C. S. Lewis asserts that: "Christians themselves ... have a bad habit of talking as if revelation existed to gratify curiosity by illuminating all creation so that it becomes self-explanatory and all questions are answered. But revelation appears to me to be purely practical, to be addressed to the particular animal, Fallen Man, for the relief of his urgent necessities--not to the spirit of inquiry in man for his gratification of his liberal curiosity" (1970, 43).

2 For this way of putting the matter, I am indebted to E. F. Schumacher's *Small Is Beautiful: Economics As If People Really Mattered* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973). See, e.g., pp. 156-7 of this book. Beyond this, I am indebted to this author for my initial doubts about the Enlightenment project and its uncritical celebration of deracinated reason.

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