# Alasdair MacIntyre's Tradition-Constituted Enquiry in Polanyian Perspective

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Everywhere it is the inarticulate which has the last word, unspoken and yet decisive.
Michael Polanyi *(PK, 71)*

ABSTRACT Key Words: tradition-constituted inquiry, rationality, Alasdair MacIntyre, Michael Polanyi, tacit knowing

*Why should inhabitants of a postmodern world commit to a contingent tradition? This essay reviews Alasdair MacIntyre's proposals for tradition constituted-enquiry and compares his account with Polanyi's ideas focusing on tacit knowing.*

## Introduction

Begin by considering the paradigm shift encountered by contemporary society: from an objectivist Enlightenment rationalism to a postmodern anti-foundationalism. One apparent consequence is the erosion of society's epistemological "faith." Remove the security of objective neutrality and reason seems destined to float on the shifting currents of subjectivity and parochialism. Perspectivism and relativism prevail in modern debate. If we acknowledge the contingency implicit in every act of knowing, must we conclude knowledge is ungrounded, or alternately, grounded only in the self? Can we retain confidence and individual responsibility with respect to rationality without affirming an impersonal, universal and disinterested reason?

For Alasdair MacIntyre, society's current framing of the question constitutes a mere continuation of the Enlightenment program. Modern debate remains limited by the objective/subjective dichotomy.[1] This MacIntyre rejects, offering what he regards as a radically different alternative that acknowledges contingency while retaining the possibility of surety in knowing. As true reasoning requires both intellectual and moral virtues, the unification of moral conviction and rational justification is at the center of MacIntyre's scheme.

Yet this strength is also the source of MacIntyre's weakness. It prompts the question: why should an inquirer commit to a particular contingent tradition in the first place?[2] MacIntyre apparently has difficulty finding an answer (at least he does not specifically attempt an answer). His particular focus remains on the importance of the rational tradition over against other modes of enquiry. He argues to establish the necessary conditions for authentic moral reasoning, rather than to formulate an epistemology per se. But MacIntyre's project is in several ways nicely complemented by Polanyi's epistemology of tacit knowledge. Here commitment, belief, and faith are viewed as the inescapable ground of all knowing thus making existential commitment prerequisite to proficient or "skilful" knowing. The following discussion begins with a broad outline of MacIntyre's schema and then turns to Polanyi for an examination of the tacit; I conclude by suggesting where MacIntyre's and Polanyi's accounts dovetail.

# MacIntyre's Diagnosis

MacIntyre's consideration of rationality is stimulated by his observation of contemporary moral discourse, which he deems typified by division and conflict.[3] This fragmentation is attributed to Enlightenment methodology.[4] According to MacIntyre, the Enlightenment aspired to ground public debate in objectified standards of rational justification, in "… principles undeniable by any rational person and therefore independent of all …social and cultural particularities…"(*WJ,* 6). Such objective standards establish a neutral or impartial base by which every moral theory or pattern of behavior is judged. While the ideal was notable, its application proved impracticable. "Morality" quickly developed into a distinct and autonomous category of thought and practice, prompting the abstraction of moral thought. Key moral themes, such as justice, were detached from their immediate social anchorage; this was a process that isolated key themes from the source of their character (TV, 26). So MacIntyre states: "to abstract …ethics from its place…is already to distort"(*TV,* 191). Or alternately, from *First Principles, Final Ends, and Contemporary Philosophical Issues*:

> Abstract…conceptions of truth and reality from [their] teleological framework, and you will thereby deprive them of the only context by reference to which they can be made fully intelligible and rationally defensible…. In consequence, conceptions of truth and rationality became, as it were, free-floating.[5]

Abstraction affords a facade of consensus to moral debate by concealing important informing presuppositions and background beliefs. Hence the Enlightenment ideal, far from furnishing universality to moral judgements, saturated modern society with an amalgam of social and cultural fragments inherited from disparate traditions. From this derives modern culture's "…inability to unite conviction and rational justification"(*WJ*, 6).

Genuine rational debate is impossible in this generalized context. MacIntyre concludes: we inhabit a culture unable to "arrive at agreed rationally justifiable conclusions…." The corresponding frustration causes disputed questions to be treated "…not as a matter for rational enquiry, but rather for the assertion and counter-assertion of alternative and incompatible sets of premises"*(WJ*, 6). Emotivism is now the de facto solution to moral debate.[6]

However, MacIntyre's agenda is not to establish the validity of traditions over against Enlightenment foundationalism per se. Moral and intellectual lives exist in a paradoxical relationship: "only insofar as we have already arrived at certain conclusions are we able to become the sort of person able to engage in such enquiry so as to reach sound conclusions"(*TV*, 63; 82-83). Failure to learn, on the other hand, "…is always rooted in defect in respect of the virtues"(*TV*, 68). Thus MacIntyre's goal is the generation of authentic character: to form people who by nature have a moral disposition, reason from that internal conviction, and have proper confidence in the results. Only such a person is equipped "to move towards a knowledge of the truth…about *the* human good"(TV, 61).

# Tradition-Constituted Enquiry

In contrast to Enlightenment methodology, MacIntyre proposes: "There is no standing ground, no place for enquiry, no way to engage in the practices of advancing, evaluating, accepting and rejecting reasoned argument apart from that which is provided by some particular tradition or other."[7] Those outside a tradition

lack sufficient rational, and indeed moral, resources for enquiry. MacIntyre rejects detached objectivity. Tradition is *the* form of rational enquiry, and progress only occurs via participation in the internal dialectic, or "conflict," of a tradition. MacIntyre encapsulates his epistemological scheme, which he designates "tradition-constituted and tradition-constitutive enquiry,"[8] so:

> … we need to recover … a conception of rational enquiry embodied in a tradition, a conception according to which the standards of rational justification themselves emerge from and are part of a history in which they are vindicated by the way in which they transcend the limitations of and provide remedies for the defects of their predecessors within the history of that same tradition (*WJ*, 7).

Central to MacIntyre's argument is his critique of the Enlightenment notion of "facts." Supposedly independent of all particularities, facts can stand in judgement over competing theories. MacIntyre opposes this popular conception: "There exists no preconceptual or even pretheoretical data, and this entails that no set of examples of action, no matter how comprehensive, can provide a neutral court of appeal." He observes that disagreements between theories include disagreement over what is and is not to be considered "a fact." This implies that the framework used to interpret a specific "fact" lends that fact particular relevance and authority. MacIntyre continues: "…each theory of practical reasoning is…a theory as to how examples are to be described, and how we describe a particular example will depend, therefore, upon which theory we have adopted."[9] Thus any appeal to a neutral realm of facts able to judge impartially between competing theories is to be considered spurious.

Rational enquiry, as understood by MacIntyre, is antithetical to detached neutrality. Seminal to a tradition's rational formation is its particular social and cultural context. A vital and organic relationship MacIntyre terms, "socially embodied traditions of rational enquiry."[10] The history of a particular community frames modes of enquiry and furnishes terms and concepts used in its intellectual scheme. So, "philosophical theories give organised expression to concepts and theories already embodied in form of practice and types of community"(*WJ*, 390). Local life shapes a tradition's peculiar teleology -- its questions, purposes, aims, and conceptual horizons -- and provides emphases and boundaries. The rational tradition itself organizes, structures, and interprets the raw data so as to give rational justification and philosophical solution to the community. For example, Aristotle's philosophical schema presupposes, and attempts to make sense of, citizenship in the Greek *polis (WJ*, 133; 389). Detached from its practical life, a tradition's rationality becomes distorted and ceases to be intelligible.

Building on this structure, MacIntyre draws two conclusions. First, when examining specific philosophical themes, such as justice, we cannot understand that theme by isolating it from its tradition. A tradition is an overall system of thought, which imposes constraints upon specific themes, and provides standards to which the protagonist is able to appeal for rational justification. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts. To judge the adequacy of a specific part, for example, a system's conception of justice, will depend on the adequacy and subsequent vindication of the whole system.

MacIntyre also concludes that each rational tradition draws upon local resources, and is formulated according to a conceptual scheme alien to that informing a competing tradition. Procedures of enquiry will mirror these distinct concepts and beliefs. For MacIntyre, acknowledging this possible incommensurability is a necessary first step towards consensus. By accurately characterizing the contrasting differences of rival

traditions, a better explanation for the diversity of standpoints is available, transforming the problem and rendering it amenable to solution.

## Tradition and Progress

Not every culture with a history qualifies as, or produces, a rational tradition. Rationality is achieved by progressing through three defined stages, according to MacIntyre. All enquiries begin embedded in certain givens: a particular community with established beliefs and practices, and which places unquestioned authority in received texts and institutions (e.g., bards, kings, and prophets). The second stage commences when these authoritative texts or utterances are subjected to systematic questioning, stimulating novel and alternate interpretations. When questioning results in new or evolved formulations that transcend previously identified inadequacies, a community has reached the third stage. This final progression remains part of an ongoing dynamic sustained by what MacIntyre terms a "problematic": an apparent set of unresolved issues and difficulties that have emerged during earlier formulations. Reference to this problematic provides a measure against which a tradition can evaluate its relative progress (WJ, 167; 361). Thus a tradition's rational development takes the form of "an argument extended through time." [11]

Truth is pivotal to this internal momentum. Yet, MacIntyre qualifies truth, defining it according to opposing tensions. First, truth is contingent and particular; it has a relative aspect. MacIntyre suggests all truth claims are founded in historical and cultural givens; knowledge of truth is only achieved by participation in a tradition. Definitions of what constitutes "truth" are particular to a tradition. Truths, or "first principles," that define a rational tradition are contingent beliefs lent axiomatic authority. Such principles have become seminal by surviving the process of dialectical questioning, vindicating themselves as superior to their historical predecessors (WJ, 360). Such truth claims may subsequently be regarded as necessary and evident, though characteristically this occurs only for individuals apprenticed to that particular tradition.

When a rational tradition claims truth for a local set of judgements, it is akin to claiming that at no point in the future will the theoretical structure shaped by those judgments develop a discrepancy or inadequacy.[12] It will remain equal to all possible developments in rational enquiry, be that meeting higher standards, or continued sufficiency with regard to superior questions. Rational justification of this type is a sustained process, being both historical and dialectical, and applies to the theory structure in its entirety (WJ, 359).

The second tension in MacIntyre's discussion of truth deals with universality and correspondence; truth has a realist aspect. MacIntyre believes it is possible to know "timeless" truth (WJ, 363), and even maintains that a conception of final truth, "a relationship of the mind to its objects which would be wholly adequate in respect to the capacities of that mind," is prerequisite to rationality (WJ, 360). Here truth relates to something external to a tradition and has the potential to translate across incommensurable traditions.[13] MacIntyre conceives truth as both substantive and nonrelative, and this allows a protagonist to make consistent and universal claims from the standpoint of a tradition.[14]

Care must be taken with this objective element, however, lest we misinterpret MacIntyre. Continuing his Enlightenment polemic, MacIntyre rejects a simplistic notion of correspondence, whereby facts impose themselves on our minds and we issue judgements in response. Correspondence, for MacIntyre, occurs when

the mind is adequate to its objects:

> Those realities which mind encounters reveal themselves as they are, the presented, the manifested, the unhidden. So the most primitive conception of truth is of the manifestness of the objects which present themselves to mind; and it is when mind fails to re-present that manifestness that the falsity, the inadequacy of mind to its objects, appears (*WJ*, 357).

To claim truth is to claim correspondence to reality. And while the possibility remains that future standards may expose the falsity, or lack of correspondence, of current claims, the protagonist is justified in accepting and acting on solutions as true representations of reality.[15] Truth remains part of "a temporal reference of reasoning,"(*TV*, 64) for which the final goal is unveiling hidden reality. So conceived, truth remains robust and realist.

Once the basic principles of rationality are established, we must ask how these stimulate development. Achtemeier, summarizing MacIntyre, sees "…a twofold process, encompassing both deductive and inductive rationality."[16] A tradition transcends conventional understanding by means of creative intuition and insight. This is a speculative and non-formalized process leading to the formulation of a new hypothesis. As with truth claims, adherents test the new theory by measuring it against the highest standards and subjecting it to the best questions available to the tradition. If by this process it proves more adequate than the earlier formulations, it becomes accounted knowledge and supplants the rival position. The second stage of deductive rationality retrospectively theorizes the new belief structure, and develops a body of subsidiary knowledge. It expands what is implicit in the theory and establishes practical applications.

## Traditions in Conflict

Aside from this natural internal dynamic, tradition-constituted enquiry progresses via two avenues: epistemological crisis, and conflict between rival traditions. Every tradition will at some stage realize, by its own standards of rational justification, that it has ceased to make progress. Conventional intellectual resources no longer supply rational solutions to its problematic; trusted methods of enquiry have become sterile, and its truth claims can not be sustained. This "dissolution of historically founded certitudes" signifies that the tradition has entered an "epistemological crisis "(*WJ*, 360ff).

This presents a key juncture in the development of a tradition. Sterile traditions cannot side step the issue by reference back to earlier positions. They are forced either to develop, or to wither. An efficacious solution demands the development of new concepts and theoretical structures.

Authentic innovation is defined by three requirements. First, the new conceptual framework must systematically solve the previously intractable problems. Second, it must articulate the causes of the tradition's sterility. Third, it must be in continuity with the defining beliefs of the preceding tradition. Rational justification for these new structures rests in their ability to provide the necessary stimulation according to the tradition's original standards. A particular tradition is considered successful when it surmounts an epistemological crisis in a way its rivals cannot. Failure to resolve this crisis leads to the rejection of a tradition's truth claims and ultimately to its defeat.

A second type of progress occurs when deciding between rival traditions. Again MacIntyre rejects any possibility of a neutral position able to narrate "the subject matter about which they give rival accounts or the standards by which their claims are to be evaluated"(*WJ*, 166). All rational debate is particular. Certain values in one tradition may have no counterpart whatsoever in their rival, and traditions that contrast in one aspect may share beliefs, images, and texts in another. Recognition of background is thus a necessary precondition to meaningful dialogue.

Once this basis is established, the potential exists for protagonists of one tradition to overhear conversations held in another. This demands of the protagonist a "rare gift of empathy" as they must: "…understand the theses, arguments, and concepts of their rival in such a way that they are able to view themselves from such an alien standpoint and to re-characterize their own beliefs in an appropriate manner from the alien perspective"(*WJ*, 167) MacIntyre dubs this learning an alien tradition, learning a "second first language"(*WJ*, 394ff).

Genuine dialogue occurs on two levels. First, each tradition, using its own terms, questions, and standards, characterizes the position of its rival. This identifies contrasting belief structures and makes explicit the fundamental incongruity of the rival. It also clarifies any possibility for shared meaning. Here a tradition may recognize where its rival is able to instruct it on subordinate questions. If such a consideration exists and the adherents of one tradition chose to ignore it, they cheapen their own standards and exclude relevant reasons for future believing or disbelieving; they stunt their own tradition.

A second, more fundamental level of dialogue transpires when protagonists are compelled to recognize in a rival tradition a cogent approach to their own previously intractable problematic (*TV*, 5; 146). Measured by their own standards, the standpoint of the rival tradition is better able to transcend the limitations confronting their tradition. Such translation differs from an epistemological crisis in that it fails to meet the third requirement: juxtaposition rather than continuity has given coherence to their problematic . A break has occurred in the tradition.

This process by which one tradition has the intellectual resources to overcome the problematic of its rival, MacIntyre sees as a process of achieving rational superiority. Rational superiority depends on a tradition explaining both its own success and why the rival tradition failed to meet the same kind of challenge. When a protagonist concedes their rival's rational superiority, they implicitly realize the overthrow of their own axiomatic truth claims. So MacIntyre asserts, "rationality… requires this acknowledgement of defeat in respect of truth…"(*TV*, 5; 146). Actual acknowledgement may not always occur. Nevertheless, the defeated tradition has lost its warrant to claim truth, and so its integrity as a tradition-constituted form of enquiry.

## Evaluating MacIntyre

How should one evaluate MacIntyre's constructive philosophical project? His attempt to unite the moral and intellectual life is a fundamentally important endeavor. Yet MacIntyre's thought remains quite ambiguous; nowhere, for example, does MacIntyre fully characterize his notion of "a rational tradition." This is deliberate: MacIntyre prefers to let "narrative histories of the traditions" define his terms.[17] However, this substantive use of narrative appears to have failed. On the one hand, MacIntyre's examples and their interpretation are contentious, and, on the other, such a non-systematic methodological approach undermines

unitary formulations. So while we take his intent seriously, questions remain.

Polanyi, like MacIntyre, sharply criticizes the ideal of scientific objectivism and, more generally, dispassionate knowledge (PK, 3ff) and the method of doubt (PK, 269ff). For Polanyi, objectivist detachment is an impossible ideal that has, in modernity, undercut important moral ideals and practices. Although MacIntyre's and Polanyi's criticisms are akin, there is a notable difference between their approaches. While MacIntyre's justification comes via a broad survey of historical examples, Polanyi's case is made within the supposed bastion of objective knowledge, the scientific community, as an account of scientific discovery (the paradigm case of all knowing for Polanyi). MacIntyre highlights tradition, Polanyi highlights the person who dwells in a community with a tradition. MacIntyre's perspective is broad, Polanyi's is focused. In many ways, Polanyi concentrates on elements MacIntyre neglects.

## A Fiduciary Framework

It is clear Polanyi holds an antifoundationalist position akin to MacIntyre's:

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

And elsewhere:

This has been the matrix of all my intellectual efforts. Within it I was to find my problem and seek the terms for its solution. All my amendments to these original terms will remain embedded in the system of my previous beliefs. Worse still, I cannot precisely say what these beliefs are ( *PK,* 252).

Polanyi's primary concern is to illumine the nature and structure of knowing, which he elucidates by examining the forces engaged in it, the tacit dimension of knowledge. For a human being, tacitly held suppositions and tacitly operating skills culminate in an articulate framework within which we foster and satisfy intellectual passions;[18] we accept and struggle responsibly to meet self- set standards formulated in cultural communities that nurture a particular articulate framework. Polanyi's account thus focuses upon the legitimacy of personal belief and its foundation in tacit powers  and the fiduciary framework, but this account bears a family resemblance to MacIntyre's discussions of "rational tradition."

## Apprenticed To A Craft

The effectiveness of MacIntyre's tradition-constituted enquiry centers on the way in which moral and intellectual virtues are inseparable and on the ability of inquirers to transform themselves into the kind of persons for whom tensions exist in dialectical unity. In *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry,* MacIntyre outlines the nature of the transformation required (*TV*, 61-66). Participation in a rational tradition is equated with apprenticeship to a craft, leading MacIntyre alternately to term his schema, "craft-constituted enquiry."[18] Apprenticeship installs an "achieved" capacity; it identifies defects and limitations, and produces in the

apprentice the virtues necessary to attain sound theoretical and practical conclusions. It is a question of requisite "skill" integral to the mature "practice" of a craft.

Likewise for Polanyi, every articulate framework operates by the exercise of skill. For example, choosing which questions to follow, how to interpret data, and how to formulate results all require skill. Accordingly, Polanyi introduces the axiom: skilful performance depends on the observance of a set of rules not consciously known to the person following them. An articulate system or, using MacIntyre's terminology "a tradition," is equated to an art (craft), which can neither be specified in detail nor transmitted by prescription. While it may be possible to prescribe an art's rules, these lack the power to determine the art's practice. They remain maxims, which guide an art only to the extent the learner can integrate them into the practical knowledge of the art.[19] The formal criteria of a rational tradition can in this same instance function as maxims, but cannot replace the practical expertise integral to the realization of that tradition. For example, according to Polanyi, a scientist's methodical procedures "… are but the maxims of an art which he applies in his own original way to the problem of his own choice"( *PK,* 311).

One can only transmit or learn an unspecifiable art, or tradition, by imitating another, by placing uncritical trust in a master. MacIntyre is in strong agreement with this Polanyian point.[20] The process of apprenticeship enables the learner to unconsciously develop "hidden" skills, and rely on tacit judgements. And to the extent we cannot precisely formalize the final articulate system, we progress according to this unconscious knowledge. We accept the verdict of our personal appraisal, which relies on our own skill as adherents of a tradition, and/ or we submit to a master's authority. Thus Polanyi's conclusion is very similar to MacIntyre's central claim that practical wisdom is more truly embodied in action than expressed by rules of action.

## Indwelling

Skillful knowing, according to Polanyi, is a performance that subordinates a set of particulars, as clues or tools, to the shaping of a practical or theoretical achievement (*PK*, vii). A tool is an object by which we make contact with things external to ourselves, for example, a probe used to examine the inside of a cavity, or the presuppositions of an interpretative framework. Using a probe tells us something about the internal dimensions and contents of the hole. Throughout the course of the action, we are alert, and "attend," to both the stick and the cavity but in different ways. The probe is not the object of our attention, but an instrument of it. Polanyi designates the difference: a *subsidiary awareness*, my palm on the probe, and a *focal awareness*, the contents and shape of the cavity (*PK*, 55-57).

While we are using a tool, it becomes part of the operating person. It is assimilated as an extension of the self -- an existential "indwelling." This is, for Polanyi, "… the general principle by which our beliefs are anchored in ourselves"(*PK*, 59).

> When we accept a certain set of presuppositions and use them as our interpretative framework, we may be said to indwell them… Their uncritical acceptance… consists in a process of assimilation by which we identify ourselves with them. They are not asserted and cannot be asserted, for assertion can be made only within a framework with which we have identified ourselves… they are themselves our ultimate framework…(*PK*, 60).

By indwelling the subsidiary particulars, the knower develops a coherent focal awareness of a whole, or a gestalt. Yet without the comprehension or meaning provided by the whole, the particulars lose their significance; the tool has no function. Thus, while the subsidiary and focal elements are distinct, their relationship is concomitant. In summary, "the art of knowing is seen to involve an intentional change of being: the pouring of ourselves into the subsidiary awareness of particulars, which in the performance of skills are instrumental to a skilful achievement (*PK*, 64).

Such an involved existential schema has commitment embedded in it. A tool, for Polanyi, is one example of, "…merging of a thing in a whole (or gestalt) in which it is assigned a subsidiary function and a meaning in respect to something that has our focal attention"*(PK,* 61). Other examples include signs, and symbols, and, in the process of knowing, we *rely* on them to signify something. This reliance is an act of personal commitment. We are only able to assimilate or indwell these signifiers to the extent we believe they are a true representation of the signified. This is an effort of knowing, "…guided by a sense of obligation towards the truth: by an effort to submit to reality" (*PK*, 63). Our claim to speak of hidden reality, something existing independent of our knowing it, serves as an external anchor and justification of our commitment. And commitment is the only framework in which assent and judgement can be responsible. Thus discovery and declared truth have an inherently personal character.

Interesting parallels can be drawn between Polanyi's ideas about indwelling and MacIntyre's concepts of "mind" and "embodiment." In contrast to the Cartesian conception, mind is activity: it engages the natural and social worlds by touching, pointing, breaking down, and developing, prompting identification, classifying, naming, etc. This multilayered process informs the mind, stimulating images and concepts, which are adequate or inadequate representations of particular objects (*WJ*, 357). Judgments issued in response serve as indicators of the truth or falsity of the mind. Embodiment occurs when the minds of those engaged in a craft make themselves adequate to the existence and properties of objects that exist independently of those minds (*TV*, 68). For "…in becoming adequate to its objects… the embodied mind actualises its potentialities and becomes what its objects and its own activity conjointly have been able to make it"(*TV*, 68). This description is suggestive of Polanyi's account of indwelling, however, MacIntyre reverses the language: "universals" now mean presuppositional theories or "first principles," and "particulars" their practical application in the moral life. So:

> To progress in…moral enquiry…is to progress in understanding *all* the various aspects of that life, rules, precepts, virtues, passions, actions as parts of a single whole. Central to that progress is…being able in particular situations to bring to bear the relevant universals and to act so that the universal is embodied in the particular.[21]

Thus for both Polanyi and MacIntyre existential commitment is prerequisite to responsible knowledge and moral action.

## Intellectual Passion

Polanyi's perspective diverges somewhat from MacIntyre's emphasis upon the rational insofar as Polanyi stresses the importance of passion , beauty and conviviality. The rational for Polanyi is bound up with

the passional, the beautiful and solidarity with social companions. Polanyi suggests that the ubiquitous tacit coefficient of human knowledge is rooted in organismic striving to overcome obstacles. Although all living forms strive to overcome obstacles and develop tacit powers, in the articulate human being, intellectual passions are a vehicle for our sophisticated struggle to understand and respond to our world. Intellectual passions are complex and active forces through which we assent to, and understand rational traditions. Passions play a selective function for human knowers by affirming the interest and value in certain positions. They also play a heuristic function by linking selected values with a vision of reality (*PK*, 159). Heuristic passions enable the knower to make an intuitive leap from problem to discovery. Such a leap is a creative and original act that irrevocably changes preexisting interpretative frameworks (*PK*, 143).

Polanyi holds that the validation of a creative leap to a new discovery comes via an appreciation of the new framework's beauty. Intellectual beauty reveals nature; beauty is a "token of hidden reality"(*PK*, 189):

> The personal participation of the knower in the knowledge he believes himself to possess takes place within a flow of passion. We recognize intellectual beauty as a guide to discovery and as a mark of truth (*PK*, 300).

Beauty is an inarticulate coefficient that guides heuristic passion, and which compels us to accept entire systems as well as individual elements as true (*PK*, 172, 145ff.). In this sense, recognition of beauty offers an indirect tribute to the values implicit in an articulate system: we are able to acknowledge beauty because it exemplifies a tradition's original *telos*.

Intellectual passions are given particular definition by the cultural framework with which they are associated: "Our formal upbringing evokes in us an elaborate set of emotional responses, operating within an articulate cultural framework. By the strength of these affections we assimilate this framework and uphold it as our culture. . ."(*PK*, 70). Acquired by our particular upbringing, these memories and convictions are held with universal intent; they are part of a, network of tacit elements on which the sharing of cultural life depends (*PK*, 203).

But also the sustenance of intellectual passions depends upon the support of the broader cultural context:

> Articulate systems which foster and satisfy intellectual passion can survive only with the support of a society which respects the values affirmed by these passions, and a society has a cultural life only to the extent to which it acknowledges and fulfils the obligation to lend its support to the cultivation of these passions…. The tacit coefficients by which these articulate systems are understood and accredited, … are also coefficients of a cultural life shared by a community (*PK*, 203).

The acquisition and sustenance of passions comes through acts of affiliation to a cultural context and this begins first as a child according to the accidents of birth. Later in life comes affiliation with a specific specialized articulate framework which extends and refines intellectual passions. A particular human being's ability to submit to the guiding passions thus implies his/her on-going participation in the cultural and specialized communities of interpretation that cultivate and accept the validity of such passions.

# Conclusions

In a number of ways, the ideas of Alasdair MacIntyre and Michael Polanyi dovetail. Yet both break new ground, developing similar themes in different ways . Polanyi's notion of the tacit provides a good complement to MacIntyre's rationalism. His views help answer the question MacIntyre's account prompts: why should the inquirer commit to a particular contingent tradition? MacIntyre's value is his rich, positive description of historically situated rationality or "tradition." His difficulty is demonstrating how this appreciation commits us, perforce, to a particular contingent tradition. Polanyi, however, because he provides an account of the tacit emphasizing the structure of indwelling and the skillful, committed, and passional nature of knowledge, makes it clearer that belief and faith are the inescapable grounds of all knowing. Polanyi's discussions of the ubiquitous tacit coefficients central to human endeavor help clarify the ways in which human response reflects our deep rootedness in life in a social community.

Some basic elements of the discussion in MacIntyre and Polanyi are strikingly similar. Both affirm that truth claims call for universal assertion; both believe "the possibility of error is a necessary element of any belief bearing on reality, and to withhold belief on the grounds of such a hazard is to break off all contact with reality."[22] Both accept self-set standards.[23] Both speak of contact with external reality, and the possibility of superior knowledge.[24] Both employ conceptual structures which transcend the objective/subjective disjunction.[25]

Although their philosophical outlooks seem to have much in common, there is a certain amount of play within this shared framework. Central to both schemes is the concept of apprenticeship. MacIntyre uses this concept to identify how growth in moral virtue is requisite to the proper apprehension and application of universals, such as justice. Polanyi takes a broader or more systematic approach to apprenticeship. He introduces the notion of skills and draws an important distinction between the articulate and inarticulate. Polanyi emphasizes that skills are not transmitted by prescription. He affirms that effective communication occurs only in the context of apprenticeship via submission to authority. These Polanyian ideas illumine MacIntyre's account: the operation of unspecifiable skills make clearer the seminal significance of tradition, a repository of skills. Polanyi shows why, if a generation fails to maintain a body of skills, that the embodiment of moral virtues becomes impossible. The practical means by which MacIntyre's universals are translated to the particular are lost.

According to Polanyi, tools are instruments through which we make contact with and interpret reality. The presuppositions of articulate frameworks are tools. MacIntyre's analytical scheme does not focus on conceptual tools but merges these elements in the concept of "mind." Primarily a reaction to a Cartesian understanding, MacIntyre's "mind" is a broad concept emphasizing activity. Mind thus encompasses every aspect of the knowing process, but consequently lacks specification and definition. By identifying the particularity of mental components as "tools," Polanyi's explanation of "indwelling" becomes clear and natural. MacIntyre's parallel move to focus on "embodiment" is more convoluted and less convincing. MacIntyre establishes the importance of embodiment, but is less effective that Polanyi in showing its inevitability.

"Intellectual passion" is an element in Polanyi's account that is missing in MacIntyre's perspective.

Passion is a part of all knowing and propels inquiry. Passion provides the impetus behind the intuitive leap from problem to discovery. The passion informing discovery is linked to beauty, for Polanyi. Discovery or novelty in a sense comes to us through passion and an appreciation for beauty. Intellectual passions are also, for Polanyi, tied to apprenticeship in a particular articulate tradition which must be supported by wider culture that, in turn, supports ideals. MacIntyre, like Polanyi, highlights creativity and intuition in discovery, though for him this comes from within a tradition. Creative intuition is the vehicle through which rational tradition transcends its old formulations and overcomes an epistemological crisis; heuristic passions are also of importance. But MacIntyre's account seems to take much more interest in -- and has more difficulty distinguishing between -- rational traditions and other, often competing, cultural jurisdictions.[75] The relationship between a specific rational tradition and the mediating cultural institutions is often unclear. MacIntyre's interest in the issue of "rational superiority" has an objectivist ring. Polanyi's emphasis upon intellectual passion, beauty and the social moorings and convivial roots of inquiry are a helpful complement to MacIntyre's quest for "rational superiority."

## Endnotes

[1] Alasdair MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), 59-60 (hereafter *TV*): "…[they] agree in framing what they take to be both exclusive and exhaustive alternatives: Either reason is thus impersonal, universal and disinterested, or it is the unwitting representative of particular interests, masking their drive to power by its false pretensions to neutrality and disinterestedness."

[2] See especially: Julia Annas, "MacIntyre on Traditions," *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 18 (1989), 394ff; Matthew Freytag, "MacIntyre's Conservatism and Its Cure: The Formal Structure of Traditions," *Philosophy in the Contemporary World*, 1 (1994), 4ff; Thomas Nagel, "Agreeing in Principle," *Times Literary Supplement*, July 8-14, 1988, 747; and, Jerome B. Schneewind, "MacIntyre and the Indispensability of Tradition," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research,* 51 (1991), 167ff.

[3] Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 1-2 (hereafter *WJ*).

[4] To survey MacIntyre's agenda, refer to: *After Virtue*, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 1-22 (hereafter *AV*), *WJ*, 1-11 and *TV*, 2-28.

[5] Quoted in Edward T. Oakes, "The Achievement of Alasdair MacIntyre," *First Things*, no.65, Aug./Sep. 1996, 25.

[6] "It is easy to understand why *protest* becomes a distinctive moral feature of the modern age and why *indignation* is a predominant modern emotion…. Protest is now almost entirely that negative phenomenon which characteristically occurs as a reaction to the alleged invasion of someone's *rights* in the name of someone else's *utility*. The self-assertive shrillness of protest arises because… the protestors can never lose an argument either. Hence the *utterance* of protest is characteristically addressed to those who already *share* the protestor's premises…. Protestors rarely have anyone else to talk to but themselves. This is not to say that protest cannot be effective; it is to say that it cannot be rationally effective." Quoted in "The

Achievement of Alasdair MacIntyre," 26.

[7] *WJ*, 350. See also *WJ,* 144: "Progress in rationality is achieved only from a point of view."

[8] See especially: *WJ*, The Rationality of Traditions, 349-70.

[9] *WJ*, 333; see also *TV*, 172-3.

[10] Alasdair MacIntyre, "Précis of Whose Justice? Which Rationality?," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 51 (1991), 151.

[11] *WJ*, 12. Also *WJ*, 8: "[to] justify is to narrate how the argument has gone so far."

[12] See Achtemeier, P. Mark. "The Truth of Tradition: Critical Realism in the Thought of Alasdair MacIntyre and T. F. Torrance," *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 47 (1994), 362-366.

[13] *TV*, 121-22: "…in judging of truth and falsity there is always some ineliminable reference beyond the scheme within which those judgements are made and beyond the criteria which provide the warrants for assertibility within that scheme. Truth cannot be identified with, or collapsed into warranted assertibility."

[14] "Précis of Whose Justice? Which Rationality?," 152. See also "Reply to Dahl, Baier and Schneewind," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 51 (1991), 176-7.

[15] Alasdair MacIntyre, "Reply to Dahl, Baier and Schneewind," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 51 (1991), 179; See also: *TV*, 88-9.

[16] "The Truth of Tradition:. . ," 368

[17] "Précis of Whose Justice? Which Rationality?," 151

[18] *TV*, 81. Also *TV*, 63: "The *telos* of moral enquiry, which is excellence in the achievements not only of adequate theoretical understanding of the specifically human good, but also of the practical embodiment of that understanding in the life of the particular enquirer, most of all requires therefore not just a craft by a virtue-guided craft."

[19] See *PK,* 49-65. Polanyi gives example of this, including: swimming, riding a bike, and playing a piano.

[20] *TV*, 63: "we shall have to learn from that teacher and initially accept on the basis of his or authority within the community of a craft precisely what intellectual and moral habits it is which we must cultivate and acquire if we are to become effective self-moved participants in such enquiry." Also*, TV*, 84: "faith in authority has to precede rational understanding."

[21] *TV*, 139; see also *TV*, 80: "To live a practically well-ordered life is to embody the universal concepts which we comprehend and justify in those enquiries in the particularities of our individual lives."

[22] *PK,* 315.  See also *TV*, 88-9

[23] *PK,* 64-65; *WJ,* 361

[24] *PK,* 374-379; *TV*, 365

[25] *PK,* 300; *TV*, 59-60

[26] This ambiguity in MacIntyre's thought is compounded by reference to a welter of contending statements. MacIntyre distinguishes between: "…the different characteristics ascribed on the one hand to traditions of enquiry, … and on the other hand to those larger social and cultural traditions which in which traditions of enquiry are embedded…." (After MacIntyre, 292.). He further notes the relationship of an intellectual tradition to its social and cultural context can differ; that competing traditions can vary and overlap within the same community ("Précis of Whose Justice? Which Rationality?," 151.); and, that the beliefs of a tradition may inform only a limited part of the whole community *(WJ*, 356.) And finally, those particular histories upon which rational tradition is based can, "flourish in environment not only different from but hostile to those in which a tradition was originally at home." (*WJ*, 392.) With regard to the individual MacIntyre notes in *TV*, 143: "The individual human being is a unity in whom the directedness of the different aspects of his spiritual and social existence have to be ordered hierarchically into a unified mode of life…. Hence arise a variety of tensions, and the practical problems of the integrity of the self are the counterpart to the practical problems of competing jurisdictions. The virtues which conjointly inform the actions of an integrated self are also the virtues of a well-integrated political community."

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