

5. See especially Polanyi's *Personal Knowledge. Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958. Polanyi's thinking has been for a long time familiar to philosophers of science, but it has received little attention from philosophers interested in the wider aspects of knowledge and action.

6. Here I run together two notions developed by Polanyi himself at different times. 'Personal knowledge' is used above all to bring out the element of commitment on the part of the scientist to his as yet unknown, but approaching, discovery. 'Tacit knowledge' relates rather to the scientist's skills; see his *The Tacit Dimension*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967.

7. *Mind over Machine. The Power of Human Intuition and Expertise in the Era of the Computer*, New York: Free Press, 1986.

8. "Knowing How and Knowing That", p. 212 of the reprint.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 223.

Tradition and Practical Knowledge

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1. Preamble¹

The first task of this chapter is to indicate how the topic of practical knowledge might involve, or why it should involve, an analysis of the notion of tradition. Such an indication is in fact not difficult to give. After all, both practical knowledge and knowledge embedded in tradition are kinds of knowledge that seem to lie outside the domain of reflection or reasoning; both presuppose an epistemological subject whose activity encompasses more than the life of pure cognition — a subject to whose make-up there belong essentially traits other than the purely mental. No wonder, then, that philosophers with an eye for the dimension of practice in knowledge will usually not fail to draw attention also to the special ways in which that dimension is transmitted: to ways of custom, to institutions of handing down, that is: to traditions.

Thus Ryle stresses that learning *how* is different from learning *that*: the former involves, as the latter does not, inculcation,² i.e. persistent repetition, impressing itself upon the subject. Thus also Michael Polanyi, after having argued that the rules of scientific discovery are no more than 'rules of art', goes on to point out that, since 'an art cannot be precisely defined, it can be transmitted only by examples of the practice which embodies it'.³ Science,

he writes at another place, 'is operated by the skill of the scientist',⁴ by a skill that, again, can be passed on only by example. But to learn by example is to submit to authority:

By watching the master and emulating his efforts in the presence of his example, the apprentice unconsciously picks up the rules of the art, including those which are not explicitly known to the master himself. These hidden rules can be assimilated only by a person who surrenders himself to that extent uncritically to the imitation of another,

— that is, by a person who is willing to 'submit to tradition'.⁵ Oakeshott, too, points out that the coherence of scientific activity does not 'lie in a body of principles or rules to be observed by the scientist, a "scientific method"'. That coherence, he stresses, lies 'in the way the scientist goes about his investigation, in the traditions of scientific inquiry'.⁶ And one of the main claims of T. S. Kuhn is of course that we have too long ignored the manner in which knowledge of nature can be tacitly embodied in whole experiences without intervening abstraction of criteria or generalisations. Those experiences are presented to us during education and professional initiation by a generation which already knows what they are exemplars of.⁷

Even Feyerabend, having, in *Science in a Free Society*, once more made his peace with Wittgenstein, writes of 'standards or rules' we could not use were they not 'well integrated parts of a rather complex and in places quite opaque practice or tradition'.⁸ As to Wittgenstein himself, one need recall only the central role his arguments played in turning into a philosophical issue the idea of knowledge embedded in, or constituted by, practice. When G. H. von Wright, interpreting Wittgenstein's *On Certainty*, coined the notion of 'pre-knowledge', knowledge that is not propositional but rather a matter of *praxis*,⁹ the profession was quick to point out that the appropriate term here was not 'pre-' knowledge, but, precisely, *practical knowledge*.¹⁰ And I would like to underline that in those arguments of Wittgenstein in which the idea of practical knowledge essentially figures, the concept of tradition,

too, almost always crops up, expressed by terms like *Gepflogenheit*, *Gebrauch*, *Institution*, *Lebensform*, *Autorität*, and so on.¹¹

2. The Infinite Regress

My point of departure is, then, roughly this: since practical knowledge encompasses, or serves as a foundation for much of what we know, and since such knowledge appears to be tacit, non-propositional, and indeed inarticulable,¹² it follows that channels of communication other than explicit discourse have indispensable functions to fulfil. Traditions represent just such channels.

That this initial position leads immediately to a whole family of difficulties is clear. The first such difficulty is presented by the notion of practical knowledge itself, which seems on occasion precisely not to require any social context of transmission. Take skills, for example. Clearly skills are, or embody, practical knowledge; but not all skills presuppose a social context. Thus cycling, one of Polanyi's favourite examples,¹³ involves a vast amount of tacit knowledge, in the sense that the mathematical description of what happens at every moment as one adjusts the curvature of one's bicycle's path in proportion to the ratio of one's imbalance over the square of one's speed is of course unknown to the cyclist, and would not help him in his performance even were it known. But I don't see what is, in principle, inarticulable about this knowledge; and I certainly cannot recall anything like a state of apprenticeship when learning to ride my first bicycle. I saw what other people were doing, but I did not learn by imitating them, I learnt by constantly falling, and then sometimes not falling, off. It seems there are *technical skills* — like cycling — and *social skills* — like speaking, or counting — and the former do not presuppose a tradition in the immediate sense in which the latter do. Or take medical diagnosis, another of Polanyi's examples. Unless a doctor can recognise a certain symptom, for example the accentuation of the second sound of the

pulmonary artery, it is no use his reading descriptions of syndromes in which this symptom occurs.

He must personally know that symptom and he can learn this only by repeatedly being given cases for auscultation in which the symptom is authoritatively known to be present, side by side with other cases in which it is authoritatively known to be absent, until he has fully realized the difference between them and can demonstrate his knowledge practically to the satisfaction of an expert.¹⁴

It was similar or related observations that led Ludwik Fleck in the early 1930s to his traditionalist, pre-Kuhnian theory of science. Thus in his explanations of the Wassermann reaction, Fleck points out that, since there is no unified theory of the underlying syndrome, different laboratories have developed somewhat different quantitative procedures to detect it; still, however, 'the experienced eye or the "serological touch"' — *das 'serologische Fühlen'* — proves 'much more important than calculation'.¹⁵ The field of serology, Fleck writes, 'is a little world of its own and therefore can no more be fully described in words than any other field of science'.¹⁶

It is however a fact that important areas of medical diagnosis are today conducted by computer programs, and it would seem strange to speak of 'personal knowledge' or 'touch' with respect to a piece of software. Yet these programs are of course based on the knowledge of experienced human experts, and it is in fact quite a problem to unearth that knowledge in software-digestible form. One becomes an expert not simply by absorbing explicit knowledge of the type found in textbooks, but through experience, that is, through repeated trials, 'failing, succeeding, wasting time and effort, . . . getting a feel for a problem, learning when to go by the book and when to break the rules'.¹⁷ Human experts thereby gradually absorb 'a repertory of working rules of thumb, or "heuristics", that, combined with book knowledge, make them expert practitioners'.¹⁸ This practical, heuristic knowledge, as attempts to simulate it on the machine have shown, is 'hardest to get at because experts — or anyone

else — rarely have the self-awareness to recognize what it is. So it must be mined out of their heads painstakingly, one jewel at a time'.¹⁹

But now, practical knowledge as here described does not seem to possess any philosophically interesting characteristics at all, and it is quite disturbing to realise that the faculty of judgment, the ability to subsume particular instances under given rules and to apply such rules, can be imparted to a suitable machine at all, at least in certain cases. For the machine is of course lacking in that social context which seemed so essential for this kind of acquisition.

The problem that confronts us here was recognised by Kant, for whom the application of rules seemed to embody a vicious sort of circularity. Kant starts out from the idea that understanding in general is a matter of rules. Judgment, more particularly, is the faculty of subsuming under rules, of distinguishing whether something instantiates a given rule. But how, now, could it be possible to formulate applicable 'rules for judgment'. For clearly we could judge on the basis of such rules only by means of other rules, and these, too, would demand guidance from judgment. Thus it appears that, 'though understanding is capable of being instructed, and of being equipped with rules, judgment is a peculiar talent which can be practised only, and cannot be taught. It is the specific quality of so-called mother-wit'.²⁰ Its absence is just what is ordinarily called stupidity, for which, according to Kant, there is no remedy:

A physician, a judge, or a ruler may have at his command many excellent pathological, legal, or political rules, even to the degree that he may become a profound teacher of them, and yet, none the less, may easily stumble in their application. For, although admirable in understanding, he may be wanting in natural power of judgment. He may comprehend the universal *in abstracto*, and yet not be able to distinguish whether a case *in concreto* comes under it. Or the error may be due to his not having received, through examples and actual practice, adequate training for this particular act of judgment. Such

sharpening of the judgment is indeed the one great benefit of examples.²¹

Ryle, too, stresses that *stupidity* is not the same as mere lack of knowledge, pointing out that 'if, for any operation to be intelligently executed, a prior theoretical operation had first to be performed and performed intelligently, it would be a logical impossibility for anyone ever to break the circle'.²² And Polanyi has pointed out that: 'The application of rules must always rely ultimately on acts not determined by rule'.²³

Hayek has drawn from this same idea an important conclusion concerning restraints on the transmission of knowledge. There will always, he tells us, 'be some rules governing a mind which that mind in its then prevailing state cannot communicate'. Even if the mind were to acquire the capacity of communicating these rules, 'this would presuppose that it had acquired further higher rules which make the communication of the former possible but which themselves will still be incommunicable'.²⁴ Yet it is exactly this infinite regress argument, seemingly so central to all philosophising about practical knowledge — and of course also to Wittgenstein's later philosophy²⁵ — which somehow loses its magic once the nature of the knowledge built into non-human expert systems has been considered.

Or take the case of Ryle's 'well-trained sailor boy', who 'can both tie complex knots and discern whether someone else is tying them correctly or incorrectly, deftly or clumsily. But he is probably incapable of the difficult task of describing in words how the knots should be tied'.²⁶ Knots are more easily tied than explained, but the boy's presumed inability to do the latter does not seem to carry a philosophical message. He might be unable to explain *anything*. Or a detailed terminology of knots could be developed, helped by which the boy would have no difficulties at all in describing and criticising. Of course the usual way to explain tying knots is through pictures rather than through words. And here one should perhaps say that, though knowledge conveyed through pictures might be non-propositional, it does not therefore

necessarily follow that it is practical, i.e. non-theoretical, in the sense of the present volume.

3. Traditions and Rationality

It might be useful, at this stage, to distinguish between two positions with regard to the issue of practical knowledge. According to the first, this knowledge is a *practical abbreviation* within the texture or flow of knowledge as such; a device of paramount pragmatic importance perhaps, but not something whose discovery should basically transform our epistemological convictions. According to the second position, there is a layer or dimension of practical knowledge which could in no sense be dissolved into knowledge of a propositional sort. Or perhaps — and this would be a stronger version of the same position — there is a hard layer of practical knowledge which serves as the bedrock upon which *all* knowledge rests. Or indeed — to formulate a yet stronger version — all theoretical knowledge represents but an articulating, a spelling out, of a knowledge which is invariably reducible to practice. Philosophers like Wittgenstein, Oakeshott, or Kuhn, clearly hold some version of the second position; but Ryle, too, flatly states that 'theorising is one practice amongst others'.²⁷

Now each of these positions has its counterpart within the theory of traditions. Let us distinguish between *primary* and *secondary* traditions, and say that secondary traditions contain and convey, in an abbreviated and often emotionally coloured form, information which could in principle, though perhaps only with a loss of convenience, be communicated in a purely discursive fashion. The information embedded in primary traditions on the other hand cannot be separated from the way in which it is handed down, or rather it can be thus separated only within a context different in kind from that in which these traditions were originally functioning.

In the case of secondary traditions, in other words, it is possible that they be dissolved in such a way that the activity whose transmission they serve be not essentially impaired. Primary traditions, in contrast, are such that the dissolution of the tradition brings with it of necessity the dissolution of the relevant knowledge. The thesis to the effect that there *are* primary traditions, a thesis to which the present essay subscribes, I shall call the *strong traditionalist thesis*, and contrast it with the *weak traditionalist thesis* which denies the existence of primary traditions but recognises the existence, and usefulness, of secondary ones. The position denying this usefulness might then properly be called *anti-traditionalist*. I take the hard-core view of practical knowledge to imply, and be implied by, the strong traditionalist thesis. In what follows I shall, very briefly, call attention to some of the issues bearing on this thesis; before doing that, however, I should like to touch upon two other, closely related topics.

The first is rationality. Reason and tradition are usually conceived of as opposed,²⁸ and even traditionalist arguments are often enough phrased in such a way as to maintain this opposition. The power of the irrational — or of the arational — is stressed, along with the importance of traditions as creating a dimension of coherence in the non-rational realm, as bringing, through their very irrationality, cohesion into society. It is in this sense that Karl Popper, quite a traditionalist in his way, writes: 'What we call social life can exist only if we can know, and can have confidence, that there are things and events which must be so and cannot be otherwise. — It is here that the part played by tradition in our lives becomes understandable.' The social world, if it is to be inhabitable at all, must contain 'a great number of regularities to which we can adjust ourselves', regularities whose mere existence may be 'more important than their peculiar merits or demerits. They are needed as regularities, and therefore handed on as traditions, whether or not they are in other respects rational or necessary or good or beautiful or what you will.'²⁹

If the strong traditionalist thesis holds, however, then this almost utilitarian way of putting things may be misleading. For strong traditionalism implies that reason itself

is ultimately grounded in traditions, or, as Oakeshott eloquently puts it: 'Rationality' just is 'the certificate we give to any conduct which can maintain a place in the flow of sympathy, the coherence of activity, which composes a way of living'.³⁰ Hence it will not do to regard rationality, as Feyerabend does, as 'one tradition among many rather than a standard to which traditions must conform'.³¹ This would still amount to an unjustifiable picking out of rationality as some one single tradition, as if there were some fixed set of criteria of what is rational, independently of the domain to which they were applied. Oakeshott, I think, comes closer to finding a more adequate formulation when he writes that 'no conduct, no action or series of actions, can be "rational" or "irrational" out of relation to the idiom of activity to which they belong' and goes on to state that 'an activity as a whole (science, cooking, historical investigation, politics or poetry) cannot be said either to be "rational" or "irrational" unless we conceive all idioms of activity to be embraced in a single universe of activity'.³²

But the author who, in my opinion, really pointed the way here, even if for 60 years no one seems to have embarked upon it, was Maurice Halbwachs, in his *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire*.³³ 'Reason,' Halbwachs wrote, 'is actually a striving to raise oneself from a narrower to a broader tradition, into which latter the memories not merely of one class, but those of all groups will fit. . . . Reason faces tradition as a broader society faces a narrower one.'³⁴ The tradition capable of absorbing a variety of other traditions, or the tradition that emerges as an amalgam of various particular ones, will then possess, or amount to, what might be called *relative rationality*; and of course all rationality is relative, at least in the sense that a 'maximum' of rationality seems impossible to conceive.

The second topic I feel should be touched upon in the present context is the relation between traditionalism and the philosophy of mind. It seems to me that the strong traditionalist thesis is simply incompatible with what is usually called mentalism or intellectualism: the view of an autonomous, sovereign mind, of a mind intimately acquainted with, and freely operating upon, its own con-

tents (images, concepts, and the like), a mind for which language, in particular, is a mere instrument of communication, an external vehicle expressing, and indeed guided by, inner thought-processes.

Wittgenstein and Ryle are of course well-known critics of this view, but their arguments are seldom taken notice of by traditionalist writers, generally insensitive to the epistemological presuppositions and implications of their position. Two notable exceptions were Edmund Burke and T. S. Eliot, both of whom did indeed realise these implications. In his essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent", Eliot wrote:

The point of view which I am struggling to attack is perhaps related to the metaphysical theory of the substantial unity of the soul: for my meaning is, that the poet has, not a 'personality' to express, but a particular medium, which is only a medium and not a personality, in which impressions and experiences combine in peculiar and unexpected ways... The emotion of art is impersonal.³⁵

And as to Burke, he not only had a theory of traditions, but in fact the rudiments of a theory of meaning to match the former. Examining the common notion, according to which words 'affect the mind by raising in it ideas of those things for which custom has appointed them to stand', Burke does 'not find that once in twenty times' any such idea or picture is formed, and indeed when it is, 'there is most commonly a particular effort of the imagination for that purpose'. Burke gives here a charming example. Suppose, he writes,

we were to read a passage to this effect: 'The river Danube rises in a moist and mountainous soil in the heart of Germany, where, winding to and fro, it waters several principalities, until, turning into Austria, and laving the walls of Vienna, it passes into Hungary; there with a vast flood, augmented by the Save and the Drave, it quits Christendom, and rolling on the barbarous countries which border on Tartary, it enters by many mouths into the Black Sea.' In this description

many things are mentioned, as mountains, rivers, cities, the sea, &c. But let anybody examine himself, and see whether he has had impressed on his imagination any pictures of a river, mountain, watery soil, Germany, &c. Indeed it is impossible, in the rapidity and quick succession of words in conversation, to have ideas both of the sound of the word, and of the thing represented; . . . nor is it necessary that we should.³⁶

In the ordinary course of conversation, Burke concludes, 'we are sufficiently understood without raising any images of the things concerning which we speak.'³⁷ This is, clearly, an approach to meaning which does not presuppose the mentalist view; it is compatible with the idea of language as an essentially social institution; it is, in particular, compatible with the strong traditionalist thesis outlined above.

4. Authority, Convention, Custom, Prejudice

Returning now to a brief examination of this thesis itself, we have to take into account, first of all, that the term 'tradition' is surrounded by a family of related terms. This family would include terms like 'authority', 'convention', 'custom', 'disposition', 'habit', 'institution', 'mentality', 'mores', 'norm', 'paradigm', 'practice', 'prejudice', 'rule', 'skill', 'style', 'taste', 'technique'. The interconnections within this family are far from unequivocal, the meanings of most of the terms vary and overlap. Clearly, both a survey of connotations and a list of stipulations is called for.

For our present purposes, however, we shall have to confine ourselves to setting forth the details of certain specific cases. Consider, first of all, the term 'authority'. Here, according to Halbwachs, it is traditions which do the job of conferring authority upon certain roles and persons.³⁸ Polanyi, on the other hand, seems to suggest that the converse is true, i.e., as he puts it, that it is

only by 'a *previous act of affiliation*', by a 'combined action of authority and trust', that the assimilation of basic traditions will become possible at all.³⁹ It is at this point that we meet the philosophy of Wittgenstein. The role played by authority in Wittgenstein's work needs no special mention here. Indeed Wittgenstein notoriously goes so far as to suggest that one 'must recognize certain authorities in order to make judgments at all',⁴⁰ and seems to underline the parallel between authority and tradition when declaring: 'Tradition is not something a man can learn; not a thread he can pick up when he feels like it; any more than a man can choose his own ancestors.'⁴¹

Or take the term 'convention'. For Hume and for Burke this notion was allied with, not opposed to, the notion of tradition. As Wilkins puts it:

Social conventions such as rules for the acquisition and transmission of property are artificial in the sense of being man-made, but given man's social nature and the mutual dependence of men there is a sense in which they are natural as well. The important thing for understanding both Hume and Burke is their general refusal to equate artificial with arbitrary.⁴²

In the rather different context of the philosophy of science, Fleck, too, strives to show that in the connotation of the term 'convention' the element of arbitrariness has no primary role to play. He stresses 'how little conventions, which from the point of view of logic may seem equally possible, are in fact felt to be of equal value'.⁴³ The supposed 'epistemological choice' is in fact much rather historically and culturally dependent, so that the convention is constrained on all sides by what has gone before. And Arnold Hauser, in the domain of the philosophy of art, draws a close terminological parallel between convention and tradition. 'Spontaneity and convention, originality and tradition' are, he writes,

inseparable from each other. The process of artistic creation is not one in which spontaneous personal experiences become communicable and accessible only

through conventional forms, but one in which the experiences to be depicted move from the outset along conventionally regulated lines. . . . Artistic expression comes about not in spite of, but thanks to, the resistance which convention offers to it.⁴⁴

Clearly, Hauser is a strict traditionalist as far as the issue of artistic creativity goes. But it is the term 'convention', not the term 'tradition', that carries the weight of Hauser's argument. The connotations of 'convention' are however no less blurred than those of 'tradition'. And here, most modern authors would seem to agree with Halbwichs, for whom convention means the same as *free agreement*.⁴⁵

Or consider, again, the next term on our list, 'custom'. It is a term extremely rich in meanings. Burton Leiser in his book on the subject lists at least nine main ones, ranging from mere *habits*, through sanctioned *regulations*, to so-called *constitutive rules*, rules which, by their very definition, could not be broken.⁴⁶ Before turning now to traditions proper, let me select one more term from our list of related notions, namely the term 'prejudice'. It was in connection with this term that Burke formulated one of his most often-quoted passages. We do not, he wrote, cast away all our old prejudices. Rather:

we cherish them to a very considerable degree; and, to take more shame to ourselves, we cherish them because they are prejudices . . . Many of our men of speculation, instead of exploding general prejudices, employ their sagacity to discover the latent wisdom which prevails in them. If they find what they seek, (and they seldom fail,) they think it more wise to continue with the prejudice, with the reason involved, than to cast away the coat of prejudice, and to leave nothing but the naked reason; because prejudice, with its reason, has a motive to give action to that reason, and an affection which will give it permanence. Prejudice is of ready application in the emergency; it previously engages the mind in a steady course of wisdom and virtue, and does not leave the man hesitating in the moment of decision, skeptical, puzzled, and unresolved. Prejudice renders a man's virtue his

habit, and not a series of unconnected acts. Through just prejudice, his duty becomes a part of his nature.⁴⁷

Burke's reluctance to be left with nothing but 'naked reason' is a reluctance characteristic of the strong traditionalist attitude; but note also the concluding reference to 'just' prejudice, with its implication that not all prejudices are just. And it is of course the idea of the unjust, the malign, prejudice which constitutes the generally accepted meaning of this term. It is in this sense that Ernst Mach could speak of 'the fetters of inherited prejudice',⁴⁸ or of the 'terrible power' of what we call — as the translation puts it — 'prejudgment or prejudice', i.e. 'habitual judgment, applied to a new case without antecedent tests'.⁴⁹ But even Mach, definitely no traditionalist, concedes that without certain 'fixed habitudes of thought'⁵⁰ new problems would not become perceivable at all. 'No one could exist intellectually,' Mach writes,

If he had to form judgments on every passing experience, instead of allowing himself to be controlled by the judgments he has already formed. . . . On prejudices, that is, on habitual judgments not tested in every case to which they are applied, reposes a goodly portion of the thought and work of the natural scientist. On prejudices reposes most of the conduct of society. With the sudden disappearance of prejudice society would hopelessly dissolve.⁵¹

It was in this spirit that Robert Musil, himself the author of a dissertation on the philosophy of Mach, pointed out that man, in his potentialities, plans, and emotions, 'must first of all be hedged in by prejudices, traditions, difficulties and limitations of every kind, like a lunatic in his strait-jacket, and only then will whatever he is capable of bringing forth perhaps have some value, solidity and permanence'.⁵²

5. In Defence of Strong Traditionalism

Of the term 'tradition', the *OED* provides some excellent definitions. Tradition, it says, is the 'action of handing over (some- thing material) to another; delivery, transfer'. It is the delivery, '*esp.* oral delivery, of information or instruction'. It is the 'act of transmitting or handing down or fact of being handed down, from one to another, or from generation to generation; transmission of statements, beliefs, rules, customs, or the like, *esp.* by word of mouth, or by practice without writing'. It is, also, that 'which is thus handed down; a statement, belief, or practice transmitted (*esp.* orally) from generation to generation'. 'More vaguely', the *OED* goes on, a tradition is a 'long established and generally accepted custom, or method of procedure, having almost the force of a law; an immemorial usage'.

Clearly these explications, however apt, do not solve our theoretical problems, partly since the explanatory terms they employ — 'handing down', 'rule', 'custom', 'practice', 'law' — themselves stand in need of elucidation, and partly because, as I tried to show in the foregoing, a host of yet other notions would seem to be of relevance here. Obviously, a nominal explication of the concept of tradition, though necessary, is not sufficient.⁵³ Rather more useful are certain particular definitions, like for example the one Hobsbawm gives of 'invented' traditions, which are taken to mean '[1] a set of practices, [2] normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and [3] of a ritual or symbolic nature, which [4] seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which [5] automatically implies continuity with the past'.⁵⁴ Useful, too, are explications such as those given by J. G. A. Pocock, who is concerned with traditions as a matter of the handing on of those ways of acting which contribute to our membership in a given society.

In its simplest form a tradition must thus be thought of as an indefinite series of repetitions of an action, which on each occasion is performed on the assumption that it has been performed before; its performance is authorised — though the nature of authorisation may vary widely — by the knowledge, or the assumption, of previous performance. In the pure state, as it were, such a tradition is without a conceivable beginning; each performance presupposes a previous performance, in infinite regress. Furthermore, it may well be that it is the assumption, rather than the factual information, of previous performance that is operative.⁵⁵

Still, what we need is not so much definitions as much rather a detailed examination of the ways in which traditions in all their forms and varieties function at the different levels and in the different spheres of social life, and all the ways in which traditions relate to such general phenomena of social life as spontaneous orders, deviance and normality, creativity, learning, group behaviour, and so on. Also the issue of so-called national or ethnic traditions, as well as the culture/civilisation contrast would merit special attention.

Here there exists already a substantial body of important research upon which one can draw. And I think much of that research directly supports the strong traditionalist thesis as formulated above. Thus with all the recent stress on linguistic universals and on the biological foundations of language, there has not survived in the literature any serious attempt to question the existence of essential layers of language culturally structured and traditionally transmitted. Noam Chomsky's oddly impoverished notion of linguistic creativity,⁵⁶ a creativity determined by genetic inheritance and following inborn patterns, has become a curio of the past. In a 1982 study Slobin and Bever could once more revert to Bloomfield's classic dictum: 'We speak . . . by certain well-practiced schemes, — sentence-skeletons that require but the variation of a few words from utterance to utterance', and point to the language-specific nature and broad contextual setting of 'schema-development'.⁵⁷

With respect to science, the role of traditions is an issue which, due to the Popper-Oakeshott controversy,⁵⁸ and especially to the controversy surrounding Kuhn's work,⁵⁹ has recently received ample attention. Important here is David Hollinger's observation that Kuhn has in fact applied to the history of science the conventional historiographic view of the part played by traditions in politics, arts, and the life of society in general.⁶⁰ Thus 'Kuhn's notion of the "paradigm", his most celebrated and maligned term', as Hollinger writes,

embodies the sense that activities are defined and controlled by tradition, and that tradition consists of a set of devices, or principles, that have proven their ability to order the experience of a given social constituency.⁶¹

And how does it carry out this function? By providing the community with the capacity to distinguish one activity from another and by setting priorities among those activities — so that the members of the community will tend to perform those activities which serve to consolidate the community itself. 'Tradition, then, is socially grounded, and its function is that of organization'; and to the extent that its constituent organising devices 'have enough flexibility to sustain them through successive, contingent experiences: to the extent that a tradition can expand and adapt, like the English common law, it is that much more likely to retain its constituency'.⁶²

As Hollinger also points out, in different communities — of which the community of modern-day natural scientists is only one specific kind — the role played by traditions may vary widely. Kuhn himself has written an essay in which he draws attention to the particular way traditions function in art, as contrasted with science. In art — but not in science — Kuhn emphasises, a tradition might be dead yet its products still living. Or, again, 'though resistance to innovation is a characteristic common to both art and science, posthumous recognition recurs with regularity only in the arts.'⁶³ Also, even though artists 'can and sometimes do voluntarily undertake dramatic changes in style on one or more occasions during

their lives',⁶⁴ still, 'most artists begin by painting in the style of their masters'⁶⁵ — and this is not an incidental fact.

Mention has been made above of the traditionalist theory of art of Arnold Hauser. Again and again Hauser emphasises that: 'Every artist expresses himself in the language of his predecessors, his models, and his teachers', so that 'every newly created work owes more to other works than to the invention and experience of its creator'.⁶⁶ Wittgenstein, too, expresses a view of this sort when he says that 'every composer changed the rules, but the variation was very slight; not all the rules were changed. The music was still good by a great many of the old rules'.⁶⁷ According to Robert Musil, even the spontaneity of an artist is inconceivable without handed-down forms and concepts: it is those very handed-down forms that become a source of originality in the creative process.⁶⁸ We have already heard Hauser insisting that conventional forms of expression themselves help to create the content of what will be expressed. Hence, even though it is true that 'expression always moves on well-worn tracks, still, the tracks multiply and bifurcate as they are being traveled'.⁶⁹ A related position has been developed, perhaps surprisingly, by Karl Popper, who sees the canonisation of Church melodies, i.e. certain restrictions on musical usage, as having produced the conditions against which counterpoint could develop. 'It was the established *cantus firmus* which provided the framework, the order, the regularity that made possible inventive freedom without chaos.'⁷⁰

It is however in theories of law, politics, and of social life in general — theories in which such apparently tradition-independent categories as truth and beauty never really played a role — that the idea of an order imposed by mere traditions has always had its strongest appeal. The works of Carl Menger, inaugurator of the Austrian School of Economics, might convey a suggestion of the unlikely parallels here obtaining between Anglo-Saxon and Austro-German thought. Thus consider the way in which Menger, in his *Investigations into the Method of the Social Sciences*, exploits ideas derived from Burke. Burke was, as Menger himself puts it, 'probably the first,

who, trained for it by the spirit of English jurisprudence, emphasized with full awareness the significance of the organic structures of social life and the partly unintended origin of these'.⁷¹ Burke taught that numerous institutions of his country

were not the result of positive legislation or of the conscious common will of society directed toward establishing these, but the unintended result of historical development. He first taught that what existed and had stood the test, what had developed historically, was again to be respected, in contrast to the projects of immature desire for innovation. Here-with he made the first breach in the one-sided rationalism and pragmatism of the Anglo-French Age of Enlightenment.⁷²

There is, Menger maintains, a 'subconscious wisdom' manifested in those institutions that come about organically; and the meddlesome advocates of reform 'would do well less to trust their own insight and energy than to leave the reshaping of society to the "historical process of development"'.⁷³ In a similar spirit, today's leading exponent of the Austrian School, F. A. von Hayek, stresses that 'since we owe the order of our society to a tradition of rules which we only imperfectly understand, *all progress must be based on tradition*'.⁷⁴ But the grand old man of contemporary German philosophy, Hans-Georg Gadamer, too, realises that the ordering of life through the rules of law and morality always amounts to more than the application of general principles. Thus Gadamer sees our knowledge of law and morality as being 'always supplemented — indeed almost productively determined — by the individual case. The judge does not merely apply the law *in concrete*; he contributes through his judgment to the unfolding of the law itself'.⁷⁵ And in the domain of legal theory, too, the ideas of the later Wittgenstein have provided new impetus. Thus it was partly under Wittgenstein's influence that H. L. A. Hart developed his conception of law as a combination of 'primary' and 'secondary' social rules. Hart's primary rules seem to be a proper subclass of the primary traditions we

described above. They are customs supported by strong social pressure, coming into being through 'the slow process of growth, whereby courses of conduct once thought optional become first habitual or usual, and then obligatory'.⁷⁶ Without their prior existence, no legal system could be built up at all.

These ideas have relevance, too, in the sphere of education, where anyone guided by a sense for primary traditions will soon find fault with many of the prevailing orthodoxies of the present day. Here again, the writings of T. S. Kuhn have shed new light on certain crucial problems. For Kuhn, with his truly revolutionary notion of normal science, underscores the need for rigid traditions within particular scientific groups if coherent scientific work is to be possible at all.⁷⁷ This view has immediate consequences for educational theory. As Kuhn has pointed out, scientific progress is, at least in the basic sciences, not achieved by 'liberal' education, by encouraging 'divergent' thinking.⁷⁸ And one can add that, at the elementary level, all learning seems to require a measure of external rigidity. Wittgenstein's later philosophy did much to lay bare the reasons for this, and it is significant that it was his work on an elementary spelling book, his *Wörterbuch für Volksschulen* of 1926, which served as the immediate prelude to that philosophy.⁷⁹ In spelling, as in elementary mathematics, methods whose advantages are today finally beginning to emerge from a number of educational surveys and reports.⁸⁰ Wittgenstein's work in this field is of relevance, too, in relation to the concept of deviance, where our theoretical attitudes are in many ways bound up with those on education. Thus it is to be expected that an awareness of the essential role that is played by more or less rigid traditions in human communities will, again, preclude the acceptance of the radically permissive views that have too often held sway in the recent past.⁸¹

The very conviction that only a social fabric entirely destroyed can be devoid of traditional elements will however enable one also to see through the claims of an excessive traditionalism. For it will enable one to recognise also the virtues and the inevitability of invented

traditions, and thereby to withstand the romantic yearning for bonds derived from the past. Nationalism on the one hand, and the attacks on contemporary 'civilisation' in the name of some more authentic 'culture' on the other, are two notable instances of an excessive traditionalist ideology. National divisions and nationalist sentiments are invariably much more the result of specific types of material conditions affecting the living.⁸² Yet nationalist ideology as often as not forfeits the politico-economic present while focusing on an imagined past. Similarly, the foe of 'civilisation', while yearning for the fictitious warmth of an age that never existed, is blind to the real traditions of his society, to the actual form of life that surrounds him. A seldom-quoted remark by Wittgenstein seems to be appropriate here. 'It is very remarkable,' he wrote in 1946, 'that we should be inclined to think of civilization — houses, trees, cars, etc. — as separating man from his origins, from what is lofty and eternal, etc. Our civilized environment, along with its trees and plants, strikes us then as though it were cheaply wrapped in cellophane and isolated from everything great, from God, as it were. That is a remarkable picture that intrudes upon us.'⁸³

Notes

1. Thanks are due to the Alexander von Humboldt Stiftung, under whose auspices the ideas in this paper were brought to fruition in their present form.
2. Ryle 1949, p. 59.
3. Polanyi 1964, p. 14. The cited passage is taken from the Introduction, but similar passages occur also in the main body of the text, e.g. on pp. 42f. and 76.
4. Polanyi 1958, p. 49.

5. Ibid., p. 53. Similar formulations can be found also in Ziman 1968, e.g. on pp. 7 and 10:

The fact is that scientific investigation . . . is a practical art. It is not learnt out of books, but by imitation and experience . . . The young scientist does not study formal logic, but he learns by imitation and experience a number of conventions that embody strong social relationships.

6. Oakeshott 1962, pp. 102f. The passage is taken from the essay "Rational Conduct" of 1950.

7. Kuhn 1970, p. 275. This seems also to be the idea taken up by David Bloor when he writes:

predicates are learnt on the basis of a finite number of instances. These are provided by teachers or authorities who must simultaneously inform and control the behaviour of the learner. The learner's task is to acquire a sense of the similarity between the cases to which he is exposed as instances of a given concept. His sense of similarity and difference must be matched to those of other language users. This involves grasping the *conventions* which are involved in the judgements about similarity and difference. (Bloor 1981, p. 88)

The parallels (and differences) between Oakeshott and Kuhn are illuminatingly brought out in an essay by M. D. King of 1971. Kuhn, King writes,

states emphatically that the term 'paradigm' denotes not a world-view but a specific example of actual scientific practice which serves as a model for a research community and implicitly defines the legitimate problems and methods of a research field for successive generations of practitioners . . . Faithfulness to the traditions which spring from paradigms or sets of paradigms is the hallmark of genuine 'science'. To break faith with established tradition is to risk being labelled a crank, a charlatan, or being made an 'outlaw'. — A sociologist reading Kuhn's attack on scientific

rationalism can hardly fail to be struck by how closely it resembles Oakeshott's famous onslaught against political rationalism; Kuhn's science like Oakeshott's politics is subject to authority of concrete traditions rather than that of abstract 'reason'. Both are seen as practical activities that, to use Oakeshott's distinction, involve not merely technical knowledge (or technique) which 'is susceptible of formulation in rules, principles, directions, and maxims' and which may therefore be learned from a book and thereafter 'applied', but also practical knowledge which cannot be reduced to rules, cannot be written down and therefore 'can neither be taught nor learned, but only imparted.'

(The Oakeshott reference is to his essay "Rationalism in Politics" of 1947.)

8. Feyerabend 1978, p. 26.

9. Von Wright 1982, p. 178.

10. Cf. Haller 1982, p. 184.

11. The crucial passages are *Philosophical Investigations*, I, 85, 198-208, 239-42.

12. This is how Plato seems to have conceived the matter: see the reconstruction in Wieland 1982, esp. p. 254: 'Of course knowledge of this kind' — e.g. the expert knowledge possessed by craftsmen — 'will be transmitted always only through a process of instruction and practice. It will never be capable of being transferred like an object. It is paradigmatic of the knowledge of the craftsman that he who possesses it cannot distance himself from it . . . It cannot be objectified, because — as a happy metaphor of Plato's has it — it is as it were grown into the action itself.'

13. *Personal Knowledge*, pp. 49f.

14. Ibid., pp. 54f.

15. Fleck 1935, p. 72 (p. 53 of translation). Incidentally, the notion of practical knowledge is, in *modern* literature, foreshadowed in the work of Max Scheler, who presumably had some, direct or indirect, influence on Fleck (cf. Fleck 1935, p. 64, n. 29). As Scheler wrote in his "Der Formalismus in der Ethik und die materiale Wertethik" of 1913:

There is something like 'practical' obeying and 'disobeying' of laws, but not of laws which 'control' natural acting as natural laws control, in the sense that natural acting would conform 'to' them in an objective manner. The laws that we have in mind are not at all given as laws (in a form of perception, of 'being conscious of . . .'); they are *experienced* as fulfilled or broken in the execution of acting. And it is only in these experiences that they are given. In this sense the acting artist is 'controlled' by the aesthetic laws of his art without 'applying' them; nor does he realize their fulfillment or violation only in the effect, i.e., in the work of art produced. In this sense, too, it belongs to the essence of the 'crime' that he who breaks laws experiences himself as breaking them while acting; these are laws with which he reckons in *practice*, whether he or others are concerned, without having to have the slightest *knowledge* of such laws, and without having to have 'thought' about them (pp. 141f. of the translation).

The notion approximated here is of course *not* the 'practical-technical intelligence' described by Scheler in his 1980, esp. p. 79.

16. Ibid.

17. Feigenbaum and McCorduck 1984, p. 67.

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid., p. 82.

20. *Critique of Pure Reason*, A132-4.

21. Ibid.

22. *The Concept of Mind*, pp. 29f.

23. *Science, Faith and Society*, p. 14.

24. Hayek 1967, p. 62.

25. See, e.g., *Philosophical Investigations*, I, 82-6 and 198ff.

26. *The Concept of Mind*, p. 56.

27. Ibid., p.26. — Similarly Feyerabend: 'What is called "reason" and "practice" are . . . two different types of practice' (1978, p. 26). Also Arnold Gehlen, even if on the basis of some rather crude arguments: 'Human knowledge is . . . almost to be defined as a phase of action' (1940, p. 52).

28. See e.g. the discussion in Coleman, "Is There Reason in Tradition?" (1968), cf. esp. pp. 242ff.

29. Popper 1948, pp. 130f.

30. *Rationalism in Politics*, p. 109. Recently the same point was made by Oswald Schwemmer. One participates, writes Schwemmer, in the '*Handlungskultur*', i.e. in the universally available forms of activity of a given group or society; and by the very possibility of such participation the rational character of those forms is established: 'the capacity of he who acts of being able to act in a way intelligible to others . . . thereby lends his actions an elementary rationality'. (Schwemmer 1984, p. 191)

31. *Science in a Free Society*, p. 7.

32. *Rationalism in Politics*, p. 102.

33. In Berger and Luckmann's *The Social Construction of Reality*, a book which amply stresses the significance of the 'pretheoretical level' of knowledge in society (e.g. on p. 65), mention is made of Halbwachs' category of 'col-

lective memory' (ibid., p. 202) - but not of his combining 'memory' and 'tradition' with *reason*.

34. Quoted from the German edition, pp. 348f. and 383. Halbwachs' suggestion actually represents a third way between the usual alternatives of either equating rationality with an attitude having some unique, standard structural characteristics, an attitude marred only by false logic, traditions, and emotions; or by accepting as rational any views or positions that are felt by the groups or persons holding them to be appropriate under the obtaining circumstances. These are the two alternatives called - rather misleadingly - the "*traditionelle Rationalitätskonzeption*" and the '*anti-traditionalistisches Rationalitätskonzept*' by Karl Acham, in his essay of 1984.

35. The essay was first published in 1917. Quoted from Eliot 1960, pp. 56-9.

36. From Burke's "Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful" (1756/7), pp. 246-52.

37. Ibid.

38. Halbwachs, *Das Gedächtnis*, p. 355.

39. Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, pp. 207f.

40. *On Certainty*, 161, cf. also 493.

41. Wittgenstein 1980, p. 76.

42. Wilkins 1967, p. 61. A similar opposition between the artificial and the arbitrary is defended by Hayek in his "Three Sources of Human Values" (appendix to Hayek 1979).

43. Fleck 1935, p. 9.

44. Hauser 1951, pp. 28, 30, 21.

45. Halbwachs contrasts the 'purely conventional' with the 'purely traditional' (*Das Gedächtnis*, p. 389).

46. Leiser 1969, pp. 7-47.

47. Burke, "Reflections on the Revolution in France" (1790), pp. 346f.

48. Mach 1943, p. 214.

49. Ibid., p. 232.

50. Ibid., p. 227.

51. Ibid., p. 232.

52. *The Man Without Qualities*, Vol. I, p. 52.

53. This is especially so if it actually fails to rise above, or indeed falls below, the dictionary level, as when Edward Shils writes:

Tradition means many things. In its barest, most elementary sense, it means simply a *traditum*; it is anything which is transmitted or handed down from the past to the present. It makes no statement about what is handed down or in what particular combination or whether it is a physical object or a cultural construction; it says nothing about how long it has been handed down or in what manner . . . The degree of rational deliberation which has entered into its creation, presentation, and reception likewise has nothing to do with whether it is a tradition. . . . Tradition - that which is handed down - includes material objects, beliefs about all sorts of things, images of persons and events, practices and institutions. It includes buildings, monuments, landscapes, sculptures, paintings, books, tools, machines, . . . practices and institutions made up of human actions. (Shils 1981, p. 12.)

54. Hobsbawm 1983, p. 1.

55. Pocock, pp. 209 and 212.
56. Cf. e.g. Sampson 1979, pp. 7 and 105.
57. Slobin and Bever 1982, esp. pp. 229 and 253.
58. See Oakeshott's *Rationalism in Politics*, and Popper's paper of 1948.
59. See esp. the Gutting and Lakatos-Musgrave volumes (see Kuhn 1970), as well as Kuhn 1977.
60. Hollinger 1980, pp. 196ff.
61. Ibid.
62. Ibid., pp. 197f.
63. "Comment on the Relations of Science and Art", in Kuhn 1977, pp. 346 and 348.
64. Ibid., p. 349.
65. Ibid.
66. *The Sociology of Art*, pp. 30f.
67. Wittgenstein 1967, p. 6. A similar thesis, incidentally, lies at the root of Arnold Schoenberg's conception of musical development and is echoed also in the paper by Smith, below.
68. There are concepts, Musil writes in 1934, which for the poet constitute

the concepts which he has inherited, with whose help he has painstakingly consolidated his personal self. He does not even need to be in agreement with them all, he can strive to change them, yet he will still remain tied to them all much more than he is tied to the ground on which he walks. The poet is not only the expression of a momentary state of his soul — even

should it be one that will introduce a new epoch. What he hands down is not decades but millenia old. (Musil 1978, p. 1250.)

Or, as he put in an essay of 1931, even the most independent writer does not produce anything 'which could not be shown to be almost without remainder dependent upon what has been handed down, both in form and in content'. Thus: 'One can only speak of originality where there is a tradition also.' (Ibid., p. 1207) The connection between creativity and underlying traditions is explored in greater detail in Grassl and Smith 1986.

69. *The Sociology of Art*, pp. 31 and 21.
70. Popper 1976, p. 58.
71. Menger 1883, p. 173. Menger's ideas in this connection were inspired also by the work of Carl von Savigny, chief representative of the German historical school of legal theory.
72. Ibid.
73. Ibid., p. 91.
74. Hayek 1979, p. 167.
75. Gadamer 1965, p. 35.
76. Hart 1963, p. 90.
77. See ch.III of his *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, and also the paper "The Essential Tension: Tradition and Innovation in Scientific Research" (1959), in his 1977.
78. "The Essential Tension", pp. 226ff.
79. 'Only a dictionary,' wrote Wittgenstein in his Preface, 'makes it possible to hold the student completely responsible for the spelling of what he has written because it

furnishes him with reliable measures for finding and correcting his mistakes, provided he has a mind to do so.' Wittgenstein 1977, p. XXXI.

80. Cf. e.g. Bennett 1976. Current West-German perceptions are especially instructive. There, in the early 1970s, it was declared that 'broadening of linguistic competence' should supplant 'training in the norms of "standard German"' in general and the 'learning of orthography' in particular. The results, as the progressive weekly *Spiegel* tells us, are by now catastrophic. Standard German was seen by the proponents of reform as the language of a certain class and as having been employed by this class as a means for the stabilisation of the existing structure of society. The effect of their reforms, however, has been that the ability of young Germans to write correctly, to read, and indeed to express themselves, has deteriorated drastically. And what sort of democracy is this, asks the *Spiegel*, where citizens are not capable of articulating their views? (Issue of 9 July 1984.)

81. 'What makes an individual a member of society and gives him claims is that he obeys its rules', writes F. A. von Hayek. 'Wholly contradictory views may give him rights in other societies but not in ours. For the science of anthropology all cultures or morals may be equally good (though I doubt that this is true), but we maintain our society by treating others as less so.' (Hayek 1979, p. 172)

82. 'Instead of being automatically united by a shared history, men . . . cannot share the historical events through which they live, unless they are already in some sense united.' (Deutsch 1953, p. 5.) On some important material determinants giving rise to feelings of nationalism see also Gellner 1964.

83. Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, p. 50.

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Theory and Practice: The Point of Contact

Roderick M. Chisholm

1. Endeavour

What follows is a highly theoretical discussion of the point of contact between theory and practice. My hope is to describe these things clearly and precisely and with the use of as few undefined terms as possible.

Theory and practice come together when a person's intentional attitudes determine the way he acts upon the world. Our 'theory' is constituted by the beliefs that we have, and our 'practice' by our endeavours. Endeavour, like believing and judging, is an intentional act or attitude, and it exhibits all those features commonly associated with intentionality.

An example of endeavour is expressed by the following locution:

S endeavours to bring it about that so-and-so.

An alternative is:

S endeavours to be such that so-and-so.

The phrase replacing 'so-and-so' may be said to describe the *content* of the endeavour. This content may be expressed in such well-formed sentences as 'there is peace