Michael Polanyi, Alasdair MacIntyre, and the Role of Tradition

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Introduction

Modernity has reached a dead end. The optimism in which the modern world was conceived and nurtured has been replaced by a thoroughgoing skepticism that denies the possibility of making meaningful truth claims, especially when those claims bear on morality and religion. The irony is that this has occurred as we have become increasingly confident of scientific utterances. Thus, as our facility to grasp the facts of the material world has exploded, our confidence in moral and religious claims has atrophied to the point that we are compelled to speak of them as mere subjective preferences. From a certain vantage, this situation might appear as a stable solution to the interminable wrangling and occasional bloodlettings that moral and religious truth claims spawned. Yet at another level, such a position is simply intolerable, for it is inhuman. It is not possible to deny for long the very things for which human souls most yearn. In fact, if these sorts of claims are denied, they will invariably assert themselves in perverted and often violent ways.

The work of both Michael Polanyi and Alasdair MacIntyre contributes significantly to overcoming the problems posed by late modernity.[1] Unlike some, they harbor no nostalgic illusions about

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[1] The following are the major books by both MacIntyre and Polanyi to which I will refer:

Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre

the possibility of returning to a golden past. Yet neither do they believe that skepticism and despair (or apathy) are satisfying alternatives. Both lament the early modern rejection of the role of tradition in enquiry. Such concepts as belief, authority, and the possibility of speaking of the reality of moral and theological truths were, in the wake of Cartesian doubt, undermined and eventually dispensed with altogether. Both Polanyi and MacIntyre argue that what has come to be called postmodernism is a logical continuation of the modern project. Ironically, both believe that the way to move beyond what they perceive as the dead end wrought by modernity is a rediscovery of the central role played by tradition. Thus, a discussion of tradition will provide a vantage point from which to compare the views of these two thinkers and comprehend the complementary way each seeks to remedy the defects of modernism and its postmodern offspring and thereby create a context within which the meaningful discussion of truth can occur. If they are correct, then we do well to attend to their work, for they serve as guides calling us out of the dark woods of modernity and offering the tantalizing possibility of something that is truly postmodern.

In the late 1970s MacIntyre mentions Polanyi with some frequency and discusses him on several occasions.[2] He criticizes him primarily for succumbing to irrationalism, which, according to

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Dame Press, 1984). Hereafter, AV; *Dependent Rational Animals* (Chicago: Open Court, 2000). Hereafter, DRA; *First Principles, Final Ends and Contemporary Philosophical Issues* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1990). Hereafter, FP; *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990). Hereafter, TV; *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988). Hereafter, WJ.

Michael Polanyi, *Knowing and Being*, ed. Marjorie Grene (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969). Hereafter, KB; *Logic of Liberty* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1998). Hereafter, LL; *Personal Knowledge: Toward a Post-Critical Philosophy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958). Hereafter, PK; *Science, Faith, and Society* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1964). Hereafter, SFS; *Society, Economics, and Philosophy: Selected Papers*, ed. R. T. Allen (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1997). Hereafter, SEP; *The Study of Man* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958). Hereafter, SM; *The Tacit Dimension* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1966). Hereafter, TD; Michael Polanyi and Harry Prosch, *Meaning* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1975).

[2] Polanyi, who died in 1976, did not have the opportunity to comment on MacIntyre's later work. He did, though, write a brief review of MacIntyre's first book, *Marxism: An Interpretation*. It is a generally favorable review, although

MacIntyre, results from Polanyi's fideism. There is a double irony here, for MacIntyre himself has also been accused of irrationalism,[3] and as I will show, MacIntyre's fully developed account of knowledge is, in many important respects, similar to Polanyi's.[4] I should note at the outset that MacIntyre's criticisms of Polanyi seem to have ceased. One might conclude that Polanyi is simply no longer a concern of MacIntyre's, but one can also explain this shift by arguing that, as MacIntyre has become more Thomistic, he has found Polanyi's thought less objectionable.[5] This seems to be evidenced in 1990's *First Principles, Final Causes and Contemporary Philosophical Issues* in which MacIntyre, now firmly converted to Thomism, makes a positive though fleeting reference to Polanyi, who, MacIntyre argues, recognizes that *phronesis* requires the possession of the other moral virtues, and, as such, Polanyi's work was in this respect anticipated by Aristotle and Aquinas.[6] If it is indeed the case that MacIntyre's view of Polanyi has modified, then MacIntyre's earlier criticism of Polanyi helps us to track MacIntyre's development as a thinker.

MacIntyre writes, in 1977, that "Polanyi is the Burke of the philosophy of science." MacIntyre does not intend this comparison as a compliment, for he is quite critical of Burke, and by linking Polanyi to Burke he extends those same criticisms to Polanyi, for, as he puts it, "all my earlier criticisms of Burke now become rel-

evant to the criticism of Polanyi."[7] Just what are those criticisms? In MacIntyre's words, Burke "wanted to counterpoise tradition and reason and tradition and revolution. Not reason, but prejudice; not revolution, but inherited precedent; these are Burke's key oppositions."[8] MacIntyre repeats the comparison in another article published in 1978:

> But Polanyi, of course—like Burke—combined with his emphasis on consensus and tradition a deep commitment to a realistic interpretation of science. Polanyi's realism rested on what he called a 'fiduciary commitment.' Feyerabend (and less explicitly Kuhn) have retained the fideism; what they have rejected is the realism and with it the objectivism which Polanyi held to as steadfastly as any positivist.[9]

We can, perhaps, gain a clearer picture of MacIntyre's view of Polanyi by further exploring MacIntyre's view of Burke. (It should be noted at this point that MacIntyre only mentions Polanyi once in the Virtue Trilogy and then only in passing.[10]) In *After Virtue*, MacIntyre again asserts that Burke contrasted "tradition with reason and the stability of tradition with conflict. Both contrasts obfuscate." In MacIntyre's view, "all reasoning takes place within the context of some traditional mode of thought," and traditions in "good working order" always "embody continuities of conflict." Thus, "when a tradition becomes Burkean, it is always dying or dead."[11] In *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* MacIntyre notes in passing that "Burke theorized shoddily" and "was an agent of positive harm."[12] Burke, he continues, "ascribed to traditions in good order, the order as he supposed of following nature, 'wisdom without reflection.' So that no place is left for reflection, rational theorizing as a work of and within tradition."[13] In short, we may summarize MacIntyre's reading of Burke as follows: Burke contrasted tradition and reason, and in so doing placed stability,

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[7] Alasdair MacIntyre, "Epistemological Crises, Dramatic Narrative and the Philosophy of Science," *The Monist* 60 (1977): 465.

[8] MacIntyre, "Epistemological Crises," 461.

[9] Alasdair MacIntyre, "Objectivity in Morality," *Morals, Science and Sociality*, ed. H. Tristram Engelhardt, Jr., and Daniel Callahan (Hastings-on-Hudson, NY: Hastings Center, 1978), 27.

[10] MacIntyre, TV, 24.

[11] MacIntyre, AV, 221-22.

[12] MacIntyre, WJ, 8, 353. Does this imply that Polanyi, too, theorizes shoddily and was an agent of positive harm?

[13] MacIntyre, WJ, 353.

consensus, prejudice, and prescription on the side of tradition. On the side of reason Burke placed conflict, rational reflection, and revolution. Because tradition is separated from any sort of rational reflection, this implies that those who favor the alternative of tradition are necessarily fideists, while those who embrace reason are rationalists (in the neutral sense of the word).

It seems clear that a careful reading of Burke shows MacIntyre's characterization of him is seriously flawed. And while it is outside the scope of this article to explore this errant version of Burke's views, it is necessary that I show how MacIntyre is in error when he equates Polanyi with this version of Burke.[14] In so doing, I will also point out the important similarities between Polanyi's thought and MacIntyre's relative to the concept of tradition. First, Polanyi does not believe that tradition opposes reason; instead, in his view, all reason necessarily occurs within a particular tradition. Second, Polanyi's view of tradition does not imply a commitment to a static view of society; instead, for him, healthy traditions are dynamic. Third, Polanyi does not believe that commitment to a tradition removes all venues for conflict; instead, internal conflict—the ability to rebel against the consensus—is a fundamental element in Polanyi's theory of tradition.[15]

MacIntyre's characterization of Burke seriously flawed.

Once Polanyi is distinguished from MacIntyre's version of Burke, several other issues emerge. First, at least in part due to his misreading of Polanyi on tradition, the pre-Virtue MacIntyre accuses Polanyi of being a fideist. While there is a sense in which Polanyi is correctly characterized as a fideist, this is not, as MacIntyre claims, due to the separation of tradition and reason. On the contrary, Polanyi believes tradition and reason are inseparable and that submission to the authority of a tradition is a prerequisite for rationality. MacIntyre, too, especially in his later writings, embraces this view of rationality, and consequently he is far closer to Polanyi than his earlier criticisms allow. Next, the respec-

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[14] This is not to say that Polanyi is non-Burkean. Indeed, Polanyi refers positively to Burke on several occasions, see TD, 62-63; KB, 67-69; PK, 54; SEP, 204-205. Since I will not detour into a discussion of Burke's thought, suffice it to say that because, as I will argue, Polanyi and MacIntyre are quite similar, they are, in many respects, similar or different from Burke in equal measure.

[15] Incidentally, the foregoing three points essentially represent Burke's view. Thus, while MacIntyre is correct that Burke and Polanyi are similar in their understanding of tradition, he is incorrect regarding the content of their respective positions.

tive alternatives offered by these two thinkers are both grounded in a philosophical commitment to realism. As such both MacIntyre and Polanyi believe that an objective reality exists and can be grasped by human minds but only provisionally and fallibly; thus, for both, all inquiry is open-ended, but the truth toward which inquiry presses is timeless. In this regard, both recognize that realism ultimately has theological implications. Finally, Polanyi and MacIntyre are motivated by a concern about what they take to be the errant direction modern philosophy has taken. The dilemma between enlightenment objectivism on the one hand and postmodern relativism or skepticism on the other is identified by both MacIntyre and Polanyi, and both insist that the dilemma is a false one. Both MacIntyre and Polanyi seek to overcome the dilemma by offering a third alternative. Where MacIntyre offers "tradition," Polanyi gives us "personal knowledge." The alternatives developed by these two men are striking in their similarities, both in terms of specific content as well as in the motivation underlying their respective work, for both seem intent on creating a context within which a meaningful discussion of ethics (not to mention theology) can occur.[16]

Reason, Stasis, and Conflict

Reason. Polanyi does not believe that reason and tradition are opposed to each other. Tradition is, in fact, a necessary condition which makes rational thought possible, for "no human mind can function without accepting authority, custom, and tradition: it must rely on them for the mere use of language."[17] Polanyi stresses his view that all language is tradition-dependent. If this is the case, and if, as he argues, "all human thought comes into existence by grasping the meaning and mastering the use of language,"[18] then it follows that all uniquely human knowing is fundamentally tradition-dependent. But it is not merely in relation to language that knowing depends upon tradition, for, according to Polanyi, a skill can be acquired only by submitting to the authority of one who possesses the skill. Thus, to become a scientist one

Tradition necessary for rational thought.

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[16] To be sure, Polanyi is not a moral philosopher as is MacIntyre, but he is convinced that his theory of knowledge has important implications for the possibility of engaging moral concepts as real truths.

[17] Polanyi, KB, 41.

[18] Polanyi, KB, 160.

must submit as an apprentice to the authority of a scientist who has mastered the art of scientific knowing. So too, with any other complex field of endeavor such as architecture, agriculture, or morality. Such a scheme implies a tradition of knowledge that is passed from one generation to the next. Thus, if knowing requires a degree of submission to the authority of an already established body of knowledge as embodied in a particular individual or school of thought, then it follows that all knowing is tradition-dependent.[19] If all knowing depends upon an underlying commitment to a particular tradition, it follows that reason is necessarily embodied in a particular tradition. That being the case, reason and tradition are not opposed to each other. Instead, in Polanyi's view, tradition is logically prior to and necessary for the exercise of all rational thought.

MacIntyre agrees that all rationality necessarily presupposes the presence of an underlying tradition. Like Polanyi, MacIntyre recognizes that language itself requires a tradition; thus, Descartes, for example, who attempted to throw off all forms of traditional knowing, expressed himself in the idiom of a particular language and thereby embraced a tradition of thought in the very process of attempting to deny all tradition.[20] Furthermore, MacIntyre also holds that acquiring the skills necessary to participate fully in a practice or craft requires submission to the teaching authority of a master.[21] But a teaching authority and learning by apprenticeship both imply the existence of a tradition in which the skills necessary for a particular practice or craft are embodied and perpetuated. Thus, complex practices depend upon the prior existence of a tradition. MacIntyre, though, goes even further, for he argues that "the resources of adequate rationality are made available to us only in and through traditions."[22] Thus, in MacIntyre's words, "to be outside all traditions is to be a stranger to enquiry;

Language requires an underlying tradition.

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[19] Cf., Polanyi, KB, 66; TD, 61-62; SFS, 56.

[20] MacIntyre writes: "It was perhaps because the presence of his language was invisible to the Descartes of the *Discours* and the *Meditationes* that he did not notice . . . how much of what he took to be the spontaneous reflections of his own mind was in fact a repetition of sentences and phrases from his school textbooks"; "Epistemological Crises," 458.

[21] MacIntyre, AV, 190-91; TV, 61-63; DRA, 88-92.

[22] MacIntyre, WJ, 369. Cf., MacIntyre, AV, 221; WJ, 13, 367, 401-402; Alasdair MacIntyre, "Precis of *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 51 (1991): 152.

it is to be in a state of intellectual and moral destitution."[23] Polanyi makes the same point when he writes, "mentally we are called into being by accepting an idiom of thought."[24] Thus, for both MacIntyre and Polanyi all thought occurs within the confines of a tradition. Therefore, all rationality is tradition-dependent, and as such, pitting tradition against reason results in philosophical confusion.

Stasis. For Polanyi, tradition is dynamic and unpredictable rather than static. This ought not to surprise us given Polanyi's background in science, for the history of science is a story of both radical change and continuity. Polanyi recognizes the fact that a tradition of inquiry provides a degree of continuity by which change can be comprehended, but at the same time he acknowledges the dynamic nature of living traditions. Traditions are dynamic on at least two levels. First, each generation reinterprets the tradition transmitted to it; thus, the tradition is altered to accommodate the particularities of those who engage it.[25] Second, each individual person who engages a tradition "adds his or her own shade of interpretation to it."[26] Because for Polanyi all inquiry entails a moral dimension, it is always possible, and indeed necessary, to look from one's tradition as it is received and creatively imagine that tradition as what it ought to be. "Processes of creative renewal always imply an appeal from tradition as it is to a tradition as it ought to be. That is to a spiritual reality embodied in tradition and transcending it."[27] Thus, tradition is dynamic as its adherents seek to pursue the transcendent ideals which the tradition embodies but does not yet fully realize. Polanyi, who claims affinity with Burke on many points, argues that his theory of tra-

Creative renewal implies an appeal to a spiritual reality embodied in tradition and transcending it.

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[23] MacIntyre, WJ, 367.

[24] Polanyi, PK, 376.

[25] Polanyi, PK, 160.

[26] Polanyi, SFS, 72. Polanyi writes: "Submission to a consensus is always accompanied to some extent by the imposition of one's views on the consensus to which we submit. Every time we use a word in speaking and writing we both comply with usage and at the same time somewhat modify the existing usage; every time I select a programme on the radio I modify a little the balance of current cultural valuations; even when I make my purchase at current prices I slightly modify the whole price system. Indeed, whenever I submit to a current consensus, I inevitably modify its teaching; for I submit to what I myself think it teaches and by joining the consensus on these terms I affect its content" (Polanyi, PK, 208).

[27] Polanyi, SFS, 56-57.

dition transcends Burke's view, for Polanyi's view of tradition "accepts Burke's thesis that freedom must be rooted in tradition, but transposes it into a system cultivating radical progress."[28] It is clear that, contrary to MacIntyre's assertions, Polanyi does not advocate a static traditionalism; instead, Polanyi attempts to wed what we might term "epistemological traditionalism" with a scientist's passion for discovery. This, incidentally, is essentially MacIntyre's position.

MacIntyre's traditionalism, like Polanyi's, is dynamic within a context of continuity. The narrative nature of traditions implies that tradition is an ongoing process of composition. Since each rational person necessarily participates in a tradition, each person contributes to the content of the tradition that develops. In MacIntyre's words, "To be an adherent of a tradition is always to enact some further stage in the development of one's tradition."[29] MacIntyre's description of tradition as a narrative is useful, for it points out both the continuity and the dynamism that characterize traditions. The latest installment of a narrative is necessarily an outgrowth of that which has been written previously. Thus, the most recent articulation of a tradition is only intelligible within the larger context of the tradition as a whole. In this sense, a tradition is characterized by its continuity. On the other hand, the narrative is without conclusion; thus, it is continually the subject of the creative impulses of those who presently embody it. This is tradition's dynamism.[30] An adequate formulation of tradition requires both elements, but only the notion of teleology gives rational enquiry a direction. In this regard MacIntyre notes that "genuinely first principles, so I shall argue, can have a place only within a universe characterized in terms of certain determinate, fixed and unalterable ends, ends which provide a standard by reference to which our individual purposes, desires, interests and decisions can be evaluated as well or badly directed."[31] Both Polanyi and MacIntyre, then, recognize the dual aspect of tradition, its continuity and dynamism, as well as the need for a transcendent goal that gives change a meaningful direction.

Conflict. Polanyi's version of tradition allows for significant de-

Tradition characterized by development within continuity.

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[28] Polanyi, KB, 71.
[29] MacIntyre, WJ, 11.
[30] MacIntyre, AV, 223; WJ, 326.
[31] MacIntyre, FP, 7.

A dynamic tradition expects and accepts internal dissent.

grees of conflict and dissent. Again, given the history of science this should not surprise us, for that history can, in large measure, be recounted as a series of radical innovations, which are initially rejected by the majority but eventually gain the status of an orthodoxy only to be overturned by another radical innovation. While it is true both that all uniquely human knowing is rooted in tradition and that entering into a tradition requires an act of submission to an authority, it is also the case that a dynamic tradition is one that acknowledges the possibility of internal dissent. Polanyi writes: "Since a dynamic orthodoxy claims to be a guide in search of truth, it implicitly grants the right to opposition in the name of truth."[32] For Polanyi, although all knowing is traditional and depends in this regard on submission to authority, he does not hold that one's submission to authority need be absolute or completely unquestioning. Instead, "every acceptance of authority is qualified by some measure of reaction to it or even against it….On the other hand, even the sharpest dissent still operates by partial submission to an existing consensus."[33] Thus, while submission to authority is necessary for knowing, it is never absolute, and even apparently radical dissent requires the prior existence of a tradition, for dissent implies agreement concerning the existence of something to which one objects. Dissent, then, is meaningless apart from an underlying consensus represented in tradition.

MacIntyre agrees. A central feature of MacIntyre's account of tradition is conflict. MacIntyre defines a "living" tradition as "an historically extended, socially embodied argument."[34] Again, "a tradition is an argument extended through time in which certain fundamental agreements are defined and redefined in terms of two kinds of conflict," one internal and the other external.[35] MacIntyre can imagine traditions in which no conflict exists, but these are, in his words, "Burkean" traditions, which are either "dying or dead."[36] On the other hand, a healthy tradition necessarily includes a degree of conflict, in part, about the very content of the tradition itself. This squares with his narrative account of traditionalism, for as we saw, a narrative is continuously develop-

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[32] Polanyi, KB, 70.
[33] Polanyi, PK, 208.
[34] MacIntyre, AV, 222.
[35] MacIntyre, WJ, 12.
[36] MacIntyre, AV, 222.

ing at the hands of those who find themselves part of the story. Since different individuals will have different visions of where and how the narrative ought to proceed, it follows that a necessary element of any tradition is a continuing discussion or argument about the meaning of the tradition in the past and the direction of the tradition in the future. Such discussion requires an underlying agreement; thus, for MacIntyre, "a high degree of homogeneity in fundamental belief" is necessary for establishing a community devoted to rational inquiry.[37]

Of course, all this may occur without the participants fully recognizing what is occurring, for at the epistemological level much of the content of tradition goes unnoticed. As Polanyi puts it, "the adherents of a great tradition are largely unaware of their own premises, which lie deeply embedded in the unconscious foundations of practice."[38] In part, a tradition can and does consist of conflict over the very content of the tradition, but those engaged in the conflict may not fully realize the fundamental premises from which they are arguing. In other words, the conflict may be engaged on one level while on another level common premises may be held tacitly and never be explicitly articulated.

Tradition and Fideism

As we have seen, prior to the publication of *After Virtue* MacIntyre accuses Polanyi of fideism, but we do well to clarify the specific way Polanyi is a fideist and the ways MacIntyre himself in his later work seems to agree with Polanyi. Polanyi makes no apologies for seeking to overturn the epistemological demands of "objectivism"[39] in his attempt to "restore the balance of our cognitive powers"[40] and thereby once again create a space for the ideals that we know to be true but cannot establish through the application of strict scientific methodology. In a key paragraph Polanyi writes:

> 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

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[37] MacIntyre, TV, 223.

[38] Polanyi, SFS, 76.

[39] For Polanyi's description of "objectivism" see PK, vii, 3, 264-68, 269-98, 381.

[40] Polanyi, PK, 266.

> 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.[41]

What we know depends on what we initially believe.

All knowing, according to Polanyi, depends on a fiduciary framework; thus, belief necessarily precedes and undergirds all knowing. In Polanyi's words, "I propose to introduce the word 'belief' in place of the word 'knowledge', with the intention of keeping always open in our minds a broad and patent access to the personal origins of our convictions."[42] In short, we must believe before we can know, and that which we know depends, in large part, on what we initially believe. This necessary element of belief occurs on multiple levels that can be summed up in the concept of tradition. Both Polanyi and MacIntyre understand that humans are embedded in linguistic, cultural, and historical realities, and that we must initially take these particularities as givens: they comprise the initial framework by which we comprehend our world, and we must accept them acritically in order to employ them to the end of achieving understanding. Human rationality, itself, cannot exist apart from a tradition which is necessarily embodied in a community of people participating in that tradition.[43]

According to Polanyi, modern philosophy, rooted in skepticism and doubt, has undermined the possibility of making truth claims about religious, moral, and aesthetic realities. In Polanyi's words "we must now go back to St. Augustine to restore the balance of our cognitive powers."[44] Polanyi's invocation of Augustine brings this point into full relief, for, according to Augustine, knowing requires antecedent belief. This sentiment is expressed in the Latin phrases to which Polanyi regularly refers in support of his point: *fides quaerens intellectum*, faith seeking understanding, and *nisi credideritis, non intelligitis*, unless you believe, you shall not understand.[45] One must submit in faith to the authority of the tradition

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[41] Polanyi, PK, 266.

[42] Michael Polanyi, "The Stability of Beliefs," *The British Journal for the Philosophy of Science* 3.11 (1952): 219.

[43] MacIntyre, WJ, 396; TV, 65; "Epistemological Crises," 461; Polanyi, PK, 151; TD, 61-62.

[44] Polanyi, PK, 266. Cf. Polanyi, "Faith and Reason," *The Journal of Religion* 41 (1961): 237-47.

[45] Polanyi, SFS, 15, 45; PK, 266; TD, 61.

into which one is inculcated before rational inquiry is possible. As MacIntyre puts it, "faith in authority has to precede rational understanding."[46] Indeed, this submission is, initially at least, not a matter of choice, for language and culture are acquired acritically, and of course, they serve to frame the particular worldview of their adherents. Thus, the language and culture by which a person critically reflects upon the world are indwelt acritically and provide the intellectual resources available to the individual as well as the limitations which constrain him.[47] While it is clear that language and culture require an initial commitment in order fully to enter into their idiom, other skills that are not primarily linguistic or cultural also require a similar step of faith. Because skills cannot be reduced to a set of explicit and comprehensive rules, one must learn the practical, tacit elements by engaging in a practice under the tutelage of a master.[48] The relationship of the apprentice to the master necessarily requires belief, for the novice must submit to the teaching authority of the master despite not initially grasping the meaning of the master's activity.[49] In Polanyi's idiom, one must indwell the master's teaching: "In order to share this indwelling, the pupil must presume that a teaching which appears meaningless to start with has in fact a meaning which can be discovered by hitting on the same kind of indwelling as the teacher is practicing. Such an effort is based on accepting the teacher's authority."[50]

If belief must necessarily precede knowing, we can draw some important implications. First, it appears that skepticism is ultimately untenable. Both MacIntyre and Polanyi agree on this point and offer Hume as an example. MacIntyre argues that Hume's radical doubt reduced him to asking questions similar to those asked by a young child. For example, Hume, when contemplating

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[46] MacIntyre, TV, 84. Cf. TV, 95-96, 99. MacIntyre writes: "Anselm's arguments are in no way accidentally in the form of prayer. To understand the required concept adequately the mind must already be directed by faith toward its true perfection. The rational justification of belief in the object of faith is internal to the life of faith" (TV, 95-96).

[47] MacIntyre, WJ, 371-72; Polanyi, PK, 112.

[48] MacIntyre, TV, 139, 225; DRA, 93, 111; FP, 41-42; Polanyi, SFS, 14; PK, 30-31, 49-50; *Meaning*, 61.

[49] MacIntyre, AV, 190-91; TV, 61-66, 82, 91-92; Polanyi, SFS, 15, 45-46, 64-65; TD, 61; PK, 53, 207-209.

[50] Polanyi, TD, 61.

the implications of his theory of knowledge asked rhetorically yet plaintively:

> Where am I, or what? From what causes do I derive my existence, and to what condition shall I return? Whose favour shall I court, and whose anger must I dread? What beings surround me? And on whom have I any influence? I am confronted with all these questions, and begin to fancy myself in the most deplorable condition imaginable, inviron'd with the deepest darkness and utterly depriv'd of the use of every member and faculty.[51]

Simultaneously to question all of one's beliefs impossible in practice.

Hume was reduced to this state, according to MacIntyre, because "he has set a standard for the foundation of his beliefs which could not be met."[52] Ultimately, this led him to radical skepticism, which in turn led him to a point in which he loses "any means of making himself—or others—intelligible to himself, let alone to others. His very scepticism itself becomes unintelligible."[53] According to Polanyi, skepticism of the Humean kind is simply unlivable, for despite Hume's talk of radical doubt, he in fact could not live his life in accord with the conclusions of his own thought. Thus, Hume "openly chose to brush aside the conclusions of his own scepticism at those points where he did not think he could honestly follow them." But "he failed to acknowledge that by so doing he was expressing his own personal beliefs."[54] Skepticism, in Polanyi's view, is disingenuous, for underlying all knowing is a fiduciary element. Thus, when a skeptic insists that doubt is rational, he is actually covertly affirming his beliefs: "Since the sceptic does not consider it rational to doubt what he himself believes, the advocacy of 'rational doubt' is merely the sceptic's way of advocating his own beliefs."[55] The failure of skepticism to provide an adequate epistemological context by which to live a life indicates that it is simply impossible to question simultaneously all of one's beliefs. To do so leads either to "mental breakdown,"[56] in MacIntyre's words, or to an inauthentic situation whereby one theoretically affirms skepticism while remaining committed to

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[51] David Hume, *Treatise*, Bk. I, iv, vii, quoted in MacIntyre, "Epistemological Crises," 462.

[52] MacIntyre, "Epistemological Crises," 462.

[53] MacIntyre, "Epistemological Crises," 462.

[54] Polanyi, PK, 270.

[55] Polanyi, PK, 297.

[56] MacIntyre, "Epistemological Crises," 466, 462.

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traditional truths in practice. Polanyi calls this duplicity "pseudo-substitution."[57]

A second implication of a theory of knowledge that depends on an initial step of belief is its obvious circularity—one must commit oneself to certain premises, and the conclusions one reaches are necessarily entailed by the premises embraced; thus, in MacIntyre's words, "the end is to some significant degree presupposed in the beginning."[58] According to MacIntyre, this circularity is not a flaw. It is, rather,

> a feature of any large-scale philosophical system which embodies a conception of enquiry, albeit an often unacknowledged feature. And it could only be thought a flaw from a standpoint still haunted by a desire to find some point of origin for enquiry which is entirely innocent of that which can only emerge later from that enquiry.[59]

Polanyi, too, recognizes the circular nature of his approach to knowledge, and like MacIntyre, rather than attempting to escape the circle, argues that this is a characteristic of all theories of knowledge. "Any enquiry into our ultimate beliefs can be consistent only if it presupposes its own conclusions. It must be intentionally circular."[60]

All theories of knowledge circular.

This element of circularity, which both MacIntyre and Polanyi recognize and embrace, is addressed by their somewhat different solutions to Meno's paradox.[61] Writing in 1990, MacIntyre follows Thomas Aquinas who, in his *Commentary on Aristotle's 'Posterior Analytics,'* wrote that "before an induction or syllogism is formed to beget knowledge of a conclusion, that conclusion is somehow known and somehow not known."[62] According to MacIntyre, we must possess "within ourselves the potentiality for moving towards and achieving the relevant theoretical and practical conclu-

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[57] Polanyi, TD, 60; PK, 233, 294, 315; KB, 22, 67-69; LL, 121-22.

[58] MacIntyre, FP, 15.

[59] MacIntyre, FP, 16. Cf. MacIntyre, WJ, 4, 175, 252; DRA, 77; FP, 13-16.

[60] Polanyi, PK, 299.

[61] This paradox, most famously stated in Plato's dialogue *Meno*, amounts to this: a person does not look for what he knows nor for what he does not know. He does not look for the former, for he already knows it. He does not look for the latter, for he does not know what to look for. In short, it appears that new knowledge is impossible to acquire.

[62] St. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the 'Posterior Analytics,'* lib. 1, lec. 3. Quoted in MacIntyre, FP, 14.

sions." But that potentiality must be actualized, and that is only possible if we are taught. Thus, "there emerges a conception of a rational teaching authority."[63] In MacIntyre's solution, we possess the potentiality to know, and that potentiality can only be actualized when we submit as an apprentice to the teaching authority of a master.

Polanyi spent considerable time on this paradox. He gives two versions of his solution that, while slightly different, are complementary. In *Personal Knowledge*, he speaks of the moment of illumination in which a "logical gap" is crossed between our formalizable knowledge and the new insight that comes to us. It is a gap because it cannot be crossed on the basis of a step-by-step process that follows explicit rules. The gap is crossed by achieving a new "tacit integration." We do this by, in the words of Polanyi's friend G. Polya, looking at the unknown.[64] This bit of advice is not as cryptic as one might initially imagine if we begin with Polanyi's theory of tacit knowing, which claims that all knowing consists in a tacit integration of objects or ideas upon which we focus and objects or ideas which we rely upon as subsidiaries. Polanyi writes:

> By fixing our attention on a focus in which we are subsidiarily aware of the data by which the solution of a problem is determined, we form a conception of this solution. The admonition to look at the unknown really means that we should look at the known data, but not in themselves, rather as clues to the unknown; as pointers to it and parts of it. We should strive persistently to feel our way towards an understanding of the manner in which these known particulars hang together, both mutually and with the unknown.[65]

Here Polanyi emphasizes the achievement of a new and improved tacit integration that reveals the solution to a problem as we discover how the particulars that we know, as well as those that we do not, cohere with one another.

Polanyi continued to refine his solution to the paradox. What we find in *The Tacit Dimension* and the essay "Creative Imagination" is quite similar to the above, except that he emphasizes intuition rather than the tacit integration of subsidiary and focal ele-

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[63] MacIntyre, TV, 63. Cf. TV, 84, 130.
[64] Polanyi, PK, 127.
[65] Polanyi, PK, 127-28.

ments.[66] Through intuition, which Polanyi defines as skillful guessing, a person can sense a growing coherence as he searches for a solution to a problem. Thus, "we can pursue scientific discovery without knowing what we are looking for, because the gradient of deepening coherence tells us where to start and which way to turn, and eventually brings us to the point where we may stop and claim victory."[67] This intuition of deepening coherence is not formulizable, for it entails a logical leap generated by an illumination that comes on the heels of a period of preparation and incubation.[68] The possibility of this movement is succinctly framed by Polanyi when he writes that "we can know more than we can tell."[69]

MacIntyre does not employ a theory of tacit knowledge or refer to intuition. In fact, he denigrates the concept of intuition. Writing in *After Virtue* he notes that "one of the things that we ought to have learned from the history of moral philosophy is that the introduction of the word 'intuition' by a moral philosopher is always a signal that something has gone badly wrong with an argument."[70] But with that said, writing in 1990 he sounds strikingly Polanyian when he writes that "all knowledge even in the initial stages of enquiry is a partial achievement and completion of the mind, but it nonetheless points beyond itself to a more final achievement in ways that we may not as yet have grasped. Hence, we can know without yet knowing that we know."[71] He goes on to speak of what he calls "an act of understanding" or an "insight" or a "judgment" by which we cross a "gap" between what we can demonstrate and what we can know. He writes:

"We can know without yet knowing that we know."

> Yet, as enquiry progresses, even in these initial stages we are compelled to recognize a gap between the strongest conclusions which

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[66] In his Introduction to *The Tacit Dimension*, Polanyi writes: "It took me three years to feel assured that my reply to the *Meno* in the Terry Lectures was right. [The Terry Lectures, delivered in 1962, were published as *The Tacit Dimension* in 1966.] This has at last been cleared up to my satisfaction in my essay "The Creative Imagination" . . . . It appears now also that what I have said in the Terry Lectures about our capacity for seeing and pursuing problems had been said long ago in *Science, Faith and Society*"; Polanyi, TD, ix-x. Thus, despite refinements in his solution, Polanyi recognizes a continuity between his early and later work on the subject.

[67] Michael Polanyi, "Creative Imagination," *Tri-Quarterly* Fall (1966): 116.

[68] Polanyi, PK, 121-23. Cf. SFS, 34-35.

[69] Polanyi, TD, 4.

[70] MacIntyre, AV, 69.

[71] MacIntyre, FP, 13-14.

such types of dialectical argument can provide and the type of judgment which can give expression to a first principle. Argument *to* first principles cannot be demonstrative, for demonstration is *from* first principles. But it also cannot be a matter of dialectic and nothing more, since the strongest conclusions of dialectic remain a matter only of belief, not of knowledge. What more is involved? The answer is an act of the understanding which begins from but goes beyond what dialectic and induction provide, in formulating a judgment as to what is necessarily the case in respect of whatever is informed by some essence, but does so under the constraints imposed by such dialectical and inductive conclusions. Insight, not inference, is involved here, but insight which can then be further vindicated if and insofar as this type of judgment provides just the premises required for causal explanations of the known empirical facts which are the subject-matter of that particular science.[72]

Rational conception follows imaginative insight.

It is important to note that MacIntyre's concept of a gap that is only crossed by an act of insight or judgment is much narrower than Polanyi's. For MacIntyre, this is an attempt to explain how an account of first principles can be developed while Polanyi's account is oriented toward the broader concern of intellectual discovery in general. Thus, MacIntyre's account attempts to show how one can move backward to first principles, while Polanyi's account focuses on showing how moving from what one knows to what one does not yet know necessarily requires an act of judgment or insight based on incomplete information, an educated guess based on prior information and experience and depending on a new tacit integration that emerges from the particulars. This is what Polanyi refers to as intuition. Nevertheless, despite this difference, both recognize that an adequate account of knowing requires an unformulizable element to cross a gap that simply cannot be bridged any other way. Understood in this light, "rational justification," as MacIntyre puts it, "is thus essentially retrospective."[73] Polanyi echoes the same sentiment when, following Poincare, he argues that there are four stages of discovery: preparation, incubation, illumination, and verification. Verification, that is rational justification, comes after the insight of illumination.[74]

Thus both MacIntyre and Polanyi deny epistemological

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[72] MacIntyre, FP, 35-36.
[73] MacIntyre, TV, 84.
[74] Polanyi, SFS, 34; PK, 121.

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foundationalism and develop accounts of knowing that recognize that (1) knowing is tradition-dependent; (2) initial belief and submission to a teaching authority is an essential element of knowing; (3) all inquiry is inherently circular; (4) we can know more than we can tell; and (5) knowing includes crossing a gap by way of insight or judgment. These similarities are striking and point to what Polanyi called the "fiduciary framework" upon which all knowing relies. To the extent that this account contains an element of fideism, it is certainly not a Kierkegaardian leap of faith. Instead it merely represents a return to an older tradition expressed simply in the dictum *fides quaerens intellectum*. Both Polanyi and MacIntyre would agree that this is nothing other than rationality rightly conceived.

This point can be further explored by taking up a related question, namely, is it possible to determine the superiority of one tradition over another? If so, is it possible for a person to change allegiance from one tradition to another? Both MacIntyre and Polanyi believe that it is possible to change traditions. Does that imply that it is possible to evaluate two traditions against each other? MacIntyre argues that it is possible to determine the "rational superiority" of one tradition over another, and he describes two ways that this determination can be made. First, the tradition capable of surviving an "epistemological crisis" where others fail is rationally superior and thus a better approximation of that reality to which all traditions aspire.[75] Second, one can undertake the painstaking task of learning the language of inquiry of another tradition as a "second first language." The subsequent evaluation, from "the inside" of both traditions can frequently illumine defects and strengths that were previously unrecognized.[76] Although MacIntyre is careful to stress that such an investigation may prove (at least for a time) inconclusive, he is firmly opposed to any suggestion of either a relativism between traditions or a tradition-independent perspective. Thus, one tradition must be rationally superior to all others, even though we may not be able to determine with absolute certainty which one that is. This element of uncertainty merely indicates the open-ended nature of all inquiry.[77]

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[75] MacIntyre, WJ, 361-69; "Epistemological Crises," 453-72.
[76] MacIntyre, WJ, Ch. 19; TV, 180-81.
[77] MacIntyre, AV, 93, 270, 277; WJ, 100-101, 172, 361; TV, 125, 142; FP, 45-46.

In discussing Polanyi on this point, MacIntyre in 1977 writes: "Since reason operates only *within* traditions and communities according to Polanyi, such a transition or a reconstruction could not be the work of reason. It would have to be a leap in the dark of some kind."[78] MacIntyre contrasts a leap in the dark, which implies a Kiekegaardian fideism, with his rationalist account. In his view, a leap in the dark requires that a person necessarily abandons all of his premises and, in a sense, blindly converts to another set of premises. MacIntyre argues that it is impossible to remain a rational being and at the same time put all of one's premises to question. That being the case, he believes that two options exist. First, one can make an irrational leap in the dark from one tradition or set of premises to another. In such a situation "there is no rational continuity between the situation at the time immediately preceding the crisis and any situation following it."[79] The second option is one that holds that in order to maintain one's rational existence, one must recognize that all rational inquiry takes place within a tradition and that moving from one tradition to another in response to an epistemological crisis requires that a degree of rational continuity exists between the first and the second state. The first alternative amounts to a radical conversion experience, while the second represents a continuous rational inquiry.[80]

But where the MacIntyre of 1977's "Epistemological Crisis" criticizes Polanyi for insisting that all "reason operates only within traditions and communities," which, according to MacIntyre, indicates that Polanyi is a fideist, the MacIntyre of 1988's *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* appears to have concluded that Polanyi is correct. Repeatedly MacIntyre insists that all rational inquiry must necessarily occur within the confines of a tradition. For example, he writes:

> There is no neutral standing ground, some locus for rationality as such, which can afford rational resources sufficient for enquiry independent of all traditions. Those who have maintained otherwise either have covertly been adopting the standpoint of a tradition and deceiving themselves and perhaps others into suppos-

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[78] MacIntyre, "Epistemological Crises," 465.
[79] MacIntyre, "Epistemological Crises," 466.
[80] Regarding the first, MacIntyre writes that "the language of evangelical conversion would indeed be appropriate"; "Epistemological Crises," 466.

ing that theirs was just such a neutral standing ground or else have simply been in error. The person outside all traditions lacks sufficient rational resources for enquiry and *a fortiori* for enquiry into what tradition is to be rationally preferred. He or she has no adequate relevant means of rational evaluation and hence can come to no well-grounded conclusion, including the conclusion that no tradition can vindicate itself against any other. To be outside all traditions is to be a stranger to enquiry; it is to be in a state of intellectual and moral destitution.[81]

Thus, for MacIntyre, it is not "possible to speak except out of one particular tradition in a way which will involve conflict with rival traditions."[82] It follows, then, that

We, whoever we are, can only begin enquiry from the vantage point afforded by our relationship to some specific social and intellectual past through which we have affiliated ourselves to some particular tradition of enquiry, extending the history of that enquiry into the present: as Aristotelian, as Augustinian, as Thomist, as Humean, as post-Enlightenment liberal, or as something else.[83]

In the final analysis, then, it appears that the later MacIntyre agrees with Polanyi that all inquiry must necessarily proceed from within a tradition upon which it is dependent for its very existence.

Polanyi agrees with MacIntyre that radically different traditions cannot even speak intelligibly to each other, for they employ different conceptual languages (and often different spoken languages as well). Thus, "formal operations relying on one framework of interpretation cannot demonstrate a proposition to persons who rely on another framework. Its advocates may not even succeed in getting a hearing from these, since they must first teach them a new language."[84] A radically different interpretational

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[81] MacIntyre, WJ, 367.

[82] MacIntyre, WJ, 401. This despite MacIntyre's claim to be addressing his book to those people who have not yet committed themselves to a tradition (WJ, 393). It goes without saying that if all rationality is tradition-dependent, it would be quite futile to address a book on practical rationality to individuals who have not yet committed themselves to a tradition. Perhaps MacIntyre intends his book for those who have not yet *consciously* and *explicitly* committed themselves to a tradition in spite of the fact that all rational persons are *tacitly* committed to a tradition. If this is the case, then MacIntyre would do well to clarify this point.

[83] MacIntyre, WJ, 401-402. Elsewhere he writes that "no way of conducting rational enquiry from a standpoint independent of the particularities of any tradition has been discovered and . . . there is good reason to believe that there is no such way"; MacIntyre, "Precis of *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*" 152.

[84] Polanyi, PK, 151.

framework "represents a new way of reasoning." That being the case, "we cannot convince others of it by formal argument, for so long as we argue within their framework, we can never induce them to abandon it. Demonstration must be supplemented, therefore, by forms of persuasion which can induce a conversion."[85] Such forms of persuasion cannot be completely formulated in terms of a rational argument the steps of which lead from commitment to one tradition to commitment to another. A logical gap intervenes which can only be crossed by an act of commitment—conversion.[86] Polanyi writes that "granting of one's personal allegiance is . . . a passionate pouring of oneself into untried forms of existence."[87] But this is not an irrational leap, for "the process of choosing between positions based on different sets of premises is thus more a matter of intuition and finally conscience, than is a decision between different interpretations based on the same or closely similar sets of premises. It is a judgment of the kind involved in scientific discovery."[88] Thus, for Polanyi, conversion from one tradition to another requires a step of faith, but this step is informed by an act of judgment and as such is not an irrational leap in the dark.

This is the case because, as both MacIntyre and Polanyi hold, all knowing is skillful knowing, and since all skills are learned only by entrusting one's self to the authority of a master, it follows that moving from one tradition to another necessarily includes a step of faith when one commits one's self to the teaching authority of another who belongs to a tradition other than one's own. Only through a process of apprenticeship can one learn to dwell in the new tradition. Thus, whether consciously or not, we become converted when we submit to the authority of another tradition in a movement that may be motivated by rational argument

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[85] Polanyi, PK, 151. Cf., SFS, 66-7; *Meaning*, 179-80.

[86] "Conversion may come to us against our will (as when faithful communists were overcome by doubts and broke down almost overnight at the aspect of the Russian trials), or—see the example of St. Augustine—it may be vainly sought for years by the whole power of our volition. Whether our will-power be evoked by our conscience to assist its arguments or drive us on the contrary in a direction opposed both to argument and conscience, no honest belief can be made or destroyed—but only self-deception induced—by will-power alone. The ultimate decision remains with conscience" (Polanyi, SFS, 67).

[87] Polanyi, PK, 208.

[88] Polanyi, SFS, 67.

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but in the end requires a step of faith. As we have seen, MacIntyre acknowledges with Polanyi the limitations of a purely formalizible rationality and the indispensable role played by belief. To be sure, Polanyi seems to relish making declarations of the necessity of belief antecedent to knowing, but given the forgoing discussion, this seems to be more an issue of temperament and perhaps one of scale rather than a qualitative difference.

Realism

Underlying both MacIntyre's and Polanyi's account of knowing is a commitment to metaphysical realism. For both, reality is independent of the knower and is knowable although only imperfectly.[89] Truth, for both, is timeless; although, our understanding of it is not.[90] This position serves as an axiom for both, and Polanyi understands the fiduciary nature of this stance:

Reality independent of the knower is knowable, albeit imperfectly.

> I declare myself committed to the belief in an external reality gradually accessible to knowing, and I regard all true understanding as an intimation of such a reality which, being real, may yet reveal itself to our deepened understanding in an indefinite range of unexpected manifestations.[91]

This intimation of reality the truth of which emerges unexpectedly as a result of new tacit integrations is characterized by hope and, according to Polanyi, points beyond itself to the realm of the transcendent. Polanyi writes: "We undertake the task of attaining the universal in spite of our admitted infirmity, which should render the talk hopeless, because we hope to be visited by powers for which we cannot account in terms of our specifiable capabilities. This is a clue to God."[92]

MacIntyre, too, clearly embraces realism in the tradition of Aristotle and Aquinas. He writes:

> My mind, or rather my soul is only one among many and its own knowledge of my self *qua* soul has to be integrated into a general account of souls and their teleology. Insofar as a given soul moves successfully towards its successive intellectual goals in a teleologically ordered way, it moves towards completing itself by becom-

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[89] MacIntyre, TV, 66; FP, 47; Polanyi, SFS, 81; TD, 23-25; PK, 148, 316, 395-96; KB, 133; SM, 35.

[90] MacIntyre, WJ, 363; TV, 66; Polanyi, SFS, 70-71, 73, 82-83; PK, 147, 315-16; KB, 172.

[91] Polanyi, KB, 133.

[92] Polanyi, PK, 324.

ing formally identical with the objects of its knowledge, so that it is adequate to those objects, objects that are then no longer external to it, but rather complete it. So the mind in finding application for its concepts refers them beyond itself and themselves to what they conceptualize.[93]

For MacIntyre, the concept of teleology—that is, the view that humans have fixed ends that are discovered and not invented—seems to entail realism,[94] and, furthermore, teleology seems to have an "ineliminable theological dimension."[95] In *Three Versions of Moral Enquiry*, MacIntyre argues that "the genealogical accusation is not just that theism is in part false because it requires the truth of realism, but that realism is inherently theistic."[96]

For both Polanyi and MacIntyre, our understanding of reality is invariably colored by the tradition in which we find ourselves. Of course, conversion to another tradition is always a possibility, but conversions are always conversions from one conceptual framework to another—there is no neutral, traditionless standpoint from which to grasp reality. In light of the above limitations on human inquiry, both MacIntyre and Polanyi conclude that all inquiry is necessarily open-ended, and although we embrace our conclusions—in Polanyi's words, with universal intent—we may be wrong. Inquiry is ongoing and entails passionate disagreement and even apparently interminable conflicts. This is not a failure. Instead, it merely reflects the reality of human limitation and the corresponding contingency of human inquiry.[97]

A False Dilemma

Finally, both MacIntyre and Polanyi point out that a false dilemma has emerged in modern philosophy. On the one hand, the intellectual heirs of Descartes, Bacon, and Locke demand that those things we claim as true must admit of explicit formulation and submit to the requirements of an epistemological method whereby universally valid conclusions can be made with absolute certainty. This is the theory of knowledge that MacIntyre identi-

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[93] MacIntyre, FP, 12.
[94] MacIntyre, FP, 6-7.
[95] MacIntyre, FP, 29.
[96] MacIntyre, TV, 67.
[97] MacIntyre, AV, 93, 270, 272, 277; WJ, 100-101, 172, 361; TV, 74-77, 125, 142; FP, 39, 45-46; "Epistemological Crises," 455; Polanyi, SFS, 53, 61; PK, 93, 95, 143, 169, 173, 250, 313, 314-16, 397, 404; KB, 57, 70, 118.

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fies with the "Enlightenment Project." This approach to knowledge has failed to meet its own rigorous demands, and such thinkers as MacIntyre and Polanyi spend considerable effort showing why this was inevitable. The reaction against this approach to knowledge comes in various forms, but generally the common thread is a diminished confidence in the attainability of both universality and certainty. Whereas the optimistic enlightenment theories of knowledge are called modern, the more pessimistic, or at least modest, reactions to modernity are often categorized as postmodern. Postmodern theories of knowledge are characterized by an emphasis on subjectivity and particularities rather than objectivity and universals, which leads to a dubiety regarding the possibility of achieving anything resembling objective truth or universally valid conclusions. In short, whereas modern theories of knowledge tend enthusiastically to make universal truth claims ungrounded by any notion of teleology or theology, postmodern theories of knowledge tend toward conclusions that are relativistic, for, in this view, the particularities of culture, religion, language, and historical moment, as well as one's own subjectivity, simply cannot be transcended.

MacIntyre explicitly identifies this dilemma in his *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*, and he correctly recognizes it as a false dichotomy. In MacIntyre's idiom, the "encyclopaedists" represent the thinkers of the enlightenment while the "genealogists" represent the postmodern reaction against modern epistemic universalism and absolutism.[98] As MacIntyre frames it, "*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."[99] But, as MacIntyre points out, there is a third alternative, which he dubs "tradition." He describes it as follows:

Reified concepts of universality and particularity present a false dichotomy.

> What this [false] alternative conceals from view is a third possibility, the possibility that reason can only move towards being genuinely universal and impersonal insofar as it is neither neutral nor disinterested, that membership in a particular type of moral community, one from which fundamental dissent has to be

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[98] This reaction was, in MacIntyre's view, inevitable, for given the premises of the Enlightenment, it had to fail. See AV, Ch. 5, "Why the Enlightenment Project of Justifying Morality Had to Fail."

[99] MacIntyre, TV, 59.

> excluded, is a condition for genuinely rational enquiry and more
> especially for moral and theological enquiry. . . . A prior commit-
> ment is required and the conclusions which emerge as enquiry
> progresses will of course have been partially and crucially prede-
> termined by the nature of this initial commitment.[100]

This summary brings together many of the elements we have been discussing. The impersonal and universalistic ideals of the enlightenment theories of knowledge are rightly rejected, but such a rejection does not necessarily imply that postmodern relativism wins by default. Instead, where the enlightenment rationalist sought to reject all dependence on tradition in the attempt to secure direct and unmediated access to universal and timeless truth, MacIntyre recognizes that rationality is tradition-dependent. But he denies that this fact of human existence is fatal to any idea of truth that transcends particularity. Concepts like authority, submission, and tradition, all of which are rejected by the enlightenment rationalists, are embraced by MacIntyre as necessary for human knowing. His tradition-constituted theory of knowledge is rescued from postmodern relativism by his underlying commitment to realism, which affirms that there exists an external reality that is both timeless and knowable. Since humans cannot rid themselves of their particularities, our knowledge of reality will always be colored by the particularities in which we live and which serve as the lens by which we view reality. But despite the imperfect nature of our knowing, it is properly conceived as knowing, nonetheless. While this account provides far less certainty than the enlightenment rationalist hoped for, it is far more substantive than that for which the postmodern has settled.

Polanyi's description of what he calls the "objectivist" maps directly onto MacIntyre's encyclopaedist. The objectivist rejects all appeals to tradition and begins with nothing except a commitment to doubt all that cannot be explicitly and definitely proven. He seeks to achieve a completely dispassionate and detached stance regarding the object of his intended knowledge in the hope of achieving complete objectivity.[101] But Polanyi goes to great lengths to show that this approach to knowledge is both intellectually dishonest and morally corrupting. In other words, given its premises, it necessarily had to fail. In terms of its purely intellectual feasi-

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[100] MacIntyre, TV, 59-60.
[101] See, Polanyi, PK, vii, 3, 264-68, 269-298, 381.

bility, those who advocated this ideal form of knowledge simply could not live up to the standards imposed by their own system. Thus, we see figures such as Descartes and Hume relying on underlying commitments to tradition (in the form of language, at least) while pretending they were operating according to purely rational principles.[102] But embracing a standard of truth that admits as knowledge only those things that can be determined explicitly and certainly eventually led to the rejection of religion and morality as proper subjects for knowledge. These were relegated to the realm of subjective value, while scientific knowledge was given full authority in the realm of objective facts. This division, when pursued to its logical ends, eventually produced a skepticism about the possibility of any religious or moral truth. But, coursing through the collective veins of the West is an impulse toward moral perfectionism, which is a remnant of our, largely discarded, Christian heritage. This combination of skepticism and moral perfectionism produced a "moral inversion" which has sanctioned horrible injustices all in the name of morality, which ironically, has no real objective status in the objectivist's scheme.[103]

Thus, for Polanyi (as well as for MacIntyre), the dichotomy between objectivism and what Polanyi calls "nihilism" actually represents an inevitable progression. In order to extricate ourselves from the terminal end of this downward spiral, we must "restore the balance" of our thought by recognizing that knowing requires personal participation in the form of commitment. Because knowing is a skill, we must submit ourselves to the authority of a tradition and to the mastery of one who belongs to the tradition. When we acknowledge the fiduciary nature of all knowing, the barrier that was erected between facts and values collapses, and once again the humane subjects can be admitted as legitimate objects of knowledge.[104] Holding this account together is a commitment to the existence of an independent reality, with which we can make contact, and the responsibility to embrace our conclusions with universal intent, as Polanyi puts it.[105] This being the case, our freedom to act is tempered by our responsibility to conform to re-

Knowing requires commitment.

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[102] Polanyi, PK, 269-98.
[103] See, Polanyi, PK, 231-35; TD, 4, 57, 85-86; KB, 14-18, 21-22, 44-45; LL, 131; *Meaning*, 17-18, 28; SEP, 83-93, 95-105, 113-15.
[104] Cf. Polanyi, PK, 133-34, 249, 265; SM, 38, 72; *Meaning*, 65.
[105] See, Polanyi, PK, 311, 313, 316, 396; TD, 78; KB, 133-34.

ality as we find it.[106] Polanyi describes the dilemma and his solution to it as follows:

> Objectivism seeks to relieve us from all responsibility for the holding of our beliefs. That is why it can be logically expanded to systems of thought in which the responsibility of the human person is eliminated from the life and society of man. In recoiling from objectivism, we would acquire a nihilistic freedom of action but for the fact that our protest is made in the name of higher allegiances. We cast off the limitations of objectivism in order to fulfil our calling, which bids us to make up our minds about the whole range of matters with which man is properly concerned.[107]

Thus, freedom from objectivism does not necessarily imply a retreat into nihilism, for, rather than being the opposite of objectivism, nihilism is objectivism's logical end. By affirming the personal element in knowing, we can again regain the capacity to affirm those ideals that we know to be true but cannot prove scientifically. In so doing, we commit ourselves to pursue responsibly those ideals, and we do so in the service of the reality with which we strive to make contact.

Conclusion

The work of both MacIntyre and Polanyi seeks to overcome the failings of modernity by transcending it. In large part they arrive at similar conclusions. In short, both MacIntyre and Polanyi argue that the modern project is self-destructive, and they both offer avenues to transcend these self-destructive tendencies. The solutions they offer seek to recover important pre-modern concepts such as tradition, belief, authority, and practice. As such, their respective solutions offer a potentially fruitful alternative to the enlightenment–postmodern dilemma.

Finally, both seem to recognize that entailed in their respective approaches to recovering that which has been lost is a renewed possibility for meaningful theological discussion. As we have seen, MacIntyre argues that teleology and realism seem to be inherently theistic, and as such to embrace a coherent account that includes teleology and realism is simultaneously to embrace the underlying theism. Polanyi, too, recognizes that his alternative to the modern dead end opens the door to theism. In the concluding

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[106] Polanyi, PK, 309.
[107] Polanyi, PK, 323-24.

paragraphs of his *Science, Faith and Society* he writes of the "transcendent obligations" that a moral society ought to pursue and argues that in light of these obligations the well-being of society is secondary to the fulfillment of these obligations in "the spiritual field." But such notions "would seem to call for an extension in the direction towards God." He concludes the book with the following: "But I would express my belief that modern man will eventually return to God through the clarification of his cultural and social purposes. Knowledge of reality and the acceptance of obligations which guide our consciences, once firmly realized, will reveal to us God in man and society."[108]

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[108] Polanyi, SFS, 83-84. Cf. Polanyi, TD, 92; PK, 324.