

## CHAPTER I TRADITION VERSUS UNLIMITED INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM

A revised understanding of tradition, one which questions the Enlightenment's ideal of submitting all tradition to the judgment of reason, suggests that human freedom meets in tradition a definite boundary. Tradition, which is effective within the life of a community, can never be brought fully into the light by reason. Working at a pre-conscious level, revealing itself gradually, it influences the way a community perceives the world and its own moral choices within it. The influence of that tradition embodied in humanity as its very historical nature is so pervasive and profound that it cannot be reduced to a datum of consciousness. If it cannot be so reduced, then it serves as a boundary to the attempt of the thinkers of the Age of Reason and of the Enlightenment to wholly subsume the past under the rule of reason.

Not only the humanities but also the natural sciences are shaped by tradition, at least insofar as it concerns the choice of topics to be addressed and the method by which they are approached. Thus one cannot exclude the power of tradition from even the scientific sphere. The historical life of society, law, politics, religion, and culture forms the individual's relation to the scientific world of nature as well as the moral world of free choice. To neither world can one gain immediate access. The tradition of which one is a part underlies both the natural and the human sciences, and characterizes – or, it can be said, limits – the liberty with which one practices them.

### I.1. Kant's Severing of Judgment from Knowledge

The relation between the natural and the human sciences is analogous to the relation between the suprasensible world of freedom and the sensible world of nature. Kant explored this relation in his Kritik der Urteilskraft. Judgment, Kant explains in the introduction, is the faculty by which a particular is subsumed under a universal.<sup>1</sup> Whether one subsumes a particular ethical problem under a given moral law, or induces in reflection a general physical law from a number of experimental observations, the faculty of judgment is at work. It legislates hierarchies which order experience. In that sense judgment, like tradition, mediates between the two realms of the sensible and the suprasensible. In judgment, on the one hand, the moral ends proposed by reason in the suprasensible world are actualized in the sensible world.<sup>2</sup> In tradition, on the other hand, the history in which one participates molds the apparently free choices which are effective in the scientific study of nature. The Kantian concept of judgment, as well as the concept of tradition, span the gap between those realms, the sensible and the suprasensible, which for the Enlightenment were separate.

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<sup>1</sup> Immanuel Kant, Kritik der Urtheilskraft, in Kant's Werke, ed. Königlich Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 9 vols. (Berlin: Druck und Verlag von Georg Reimer, 1908), Vol. V, "Einleitung," iv .179. The Critique of Judgement, trans. by James Creed Meredith (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1928), p. 18.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, ii, pp. 175-6 (trans.: p. 14).

But judgment, according to Kant, is a transcendental faculty. It transcends the empirical content of the particulars and universals with which it is concerned, giving a law to itself alone, as it were, and not to nature.<sup>3</sup> Although judgment is effective in both the sensible and supersensible realms, its principle cannot be borrowed from the experience of those realms. It is therefore incapable, in Kant's estimate, of genuinely contributing to knowledge.<sup>4</sup> This is the critical point. Kant's exclusion of judgment from the faculties of knowledge stems from his project of confining knowledge to what has been experienced. Judgment extends beyond experience, because its source lies in an acquired sense of taste or proportion, and in an anticipation of an ultimate goal and purpose. It has to do, in brief, with time past and future.

With this preparation, we begin to see why for Gadamer the development of the Kantian concept of judgment is a decisive moment in the decline of tradition. The divorce of judgment from knowledge, due to judgment's transcendental principle, obscures the claim of both judgment and tradition to truth. Judgment cannot draw its principle from experience, because it tells us not what is, but how we ought to order what is. Confining itself to the form of knowledge, judgment transcends, according to Kant, the content of knowledge. This analysis marked a turning-point for the human sciences. About them, Gadamer writes:

Now Kant's transcendental analysis made it impossible to acknowledge the claim to truth of the tradition, to the cultivation and study of which they devoted themselves. But this meant that the unique method of the human sciences lost its justification.<sup>5</sup>

At this point Gadamer explicitly links a decline in the understanding of truth, for which the Kantian doctrine marks a decisive step, with a decline in tradition. Kant's denial of the constituent role of judgment in knowledge deprived the *Geisteswissenschaften* of their legitimacy, precisely because they study and cultivate tradition. When judgment

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., iv, p. 180 (translation: p. 19).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., vii, p. 189 (translation: p. 30).

<sup>5</sup> "Jetzt war – durch Kants transzendente Fragestellung – der Weg verbaut, die Überlieferung, deren Pflege und deren Studium sie sich widmeten, in ihrem eigentümlichen Wahrheitsanspruch anzuerkennen. Damit ging aber der methodischen Eigenart der Geisteswissenschaften ihre Legitimation im Grunde verloren." Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode. Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik*. 4th ed. (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1975), p. 38. *Truth and Method*, trans. edited from the third (1965) edition by Garrett Barden and John Cumming (New York: Seabury, 1975), pp. 38-39. The English loses some of the precision of the German, in which the acknowledgment of tradition's claim is merely obstructed ("verbaut"), rather than made impossible.

became transcendent, that is, an ordering principle for (rather than a constituent of) knowledge, tradition fell into disfavor.

Gadamer's main point, needless to say, is not the decline of tradition. He aims to show, rather, that the transcendental manner in which Kant phrased the question of judgment resulted in a "subjectivization" of aesthetics whose fruits were the rise of aesthetic consciousness and of romantic hermeneutics. But this subjectivization is perhaps the clearest symptom of the decline of tradition. For that reason, the parallels between judgment and tradition have to be made clear.

Kant saw clearly that judgment, which gives a rule to experience, has itself no rule that can be drawn from experience. There is, in brief, no rule for giving rules. But by posing his question in a transcendental way, allowing judgment to transcend the particulars which it orders, severing judgment from knowledge, Kant divorced judgment from truth. Knowledge, in his system, belongs only to what the individual can experience. Individuals cannot experience judgment in the way they experience nature or freedom; nor can they, in that way, experience tradition. Instead, they are educated into it. This holds true for both judgment and tradition, and is their first point of similarity. To be sure, one cannot learn judgment in the same way one can study a document of tradition. But tradition is more than its own objective documents.

To stand in a tradition is to be immersed in it, and to acquire judgment is to slowly appropriate the culture and civilization which give judgment its context. Both take place gradually, over time. Human beings acquire judgment by being educated into a tradition, assimilating it, becoming initiated in a gradual way. That much can be surmised from Kant's own writings. Judgment, it can further be said, is encountered indirectly through the media – language, family, church, and society – which transmit it. Neither judgment nor tradition, however, can be reduced to a particular experience. It is in this precise Kantian sense that the faculty of judgment is of no significance for true knowledge. One finds in this severing of judgment from knowledge an important moment in the obstruction of the acknowledgment of tradition's truth.

With this obstruction, as Gadamer states in the quotation above, the legitimacy of the method of the *Geisteswissenschaften* was lost. That method is the self-dedication by the human sciences to the cultivation of their own tradition. The tradition makes a claim to truth. The relation between truth and the method of the humanities (the overall theme of Gadamer's book) remains obscure in the brief passage quoted. No one contests that tradition makes a claim to truth. But how it brings the truth forward is not yet clear. An impersonal method of studying the tradition – a method conceived as a procedure alien to its subject matter – cannot result in even a partial truth.

Here we find yet another point of similarity between the general concept of tradition and the Kantian faculty of judgment. Just as that faculty cannot derive its principle from experience, so the claim to truth of tradition is no automatic result of the application of a scientific method to the humanities. Their relation to truth is as indirect as judgment's relation to it. To this extent, Kant's analysis of judgment, which shows the

irreducibility of judgment to the data of experience (and thus to an impersonal method), is of unrivalled importance for the study of tradition.

We shall touch upon this in a subsequent discussion of common or communal sense. But the conclusion of Kant's analysis – that because there is no experiential basis for judgment, judgment cannot contribute to knowledge – marks a decline in tradition. If one adopts the Kantian view, in which immediate experience is the basis for a method which secures all knowledge, then one must reject judgment's contribution as unmethodical. Furthermore, the reflexive method of the human sciences, as indirect as the method of judgment, must also be abandoned as a way to truth. Insofar as it was abandoned by post-Kantian thinkers, the understanding of the truth of the *Geisteswissenschaften* was diminished.

### I. 2. Gadamer's Implicit Standpoint

We have now begun to see how Gadamer connects the question of truth, which declined as a result of Kant's transcendental question, with the decline of tradition. To speak of such a decline implies the adoption of a standpoint, a standpoint with a dual perspective. On the one hand, a decline is always a decline from something. In other words, the notion of a decline implies a particular time, before the decline, from which the decline can be measured. This time is, for Gadamer's concept of truth, the many-centuries of the influence of Greek ethics within Christian moral philosophy.<sup>6</sup> In particular, Plato's dialectical ethic,<sup>7</sup> and Aristotle's ethic of the mean,<sup>8</sup> represent the early establishment of that tradition of moral philosophy with which Kant's Kritik der Urteilskraft broke. This is Gadamer's first perspective. The transcendental posing of the question of judgment appears as a moment in the decline of the understanding of truth and tradition precisely when compared to the Greek ethics taken up by Christianity throughout its first seventeen centuries.

On the other hand, a decline is a kind of forgetfulness. Kant's third critique was powerfully persuasive, one can say, because the force of that Greek ethics had diminished; in a word, its compelling qualities had been forgotten. To describe the influence of the Kantian critique as a moment in a decline, the power of the Greek ethics has to be recalled, restored, remembered. Thanks to that recollection (and this is Gadamer's second perspective), the decline appears as a decline. But this also means that the decline has been reversed, or at least that the reversal is anticipated.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 37 (translation: p. 38).

<sup>7</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, Platos dialektische Ethik und andere Studien zur platonischen Philosophie (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1968).

<sup>8</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, Die Idee des Guten zwischen Plato und Aristoteles (Heidelberg: Winter Verlag, 1978).

The broadening of the question of truth, including the rehabilitation of tradition – both of which constitute the second part of Wahrheit und Methode – are the conditions for identifying the period of the Kantian critique and its consequences as part of a decline. It appears as such to Gadamer because he anticipates its future reversal, a reversal which has already begun. Thus the dual perspective from which the decline can be studied is a perspective of past and future, the past of Graeco-Christian ethics and the future of Gadamer's own philosophical hermeneutics.

This perspective raises the question of prejudice. To say that the decline of tradition appears as such within a given perspective implies that, if one does not share the perspective, one will not see the decline. The decline is thereby relativized. It is relative to one's perspective, to what one holds as normative, to the tradition within which one stands. Its truth does not rely solely upon the verdict of reason, but draws its power from an appropriated history and an anticipated future.

This, however, is exactly what the Enlightenment and its followers distrusted. Their investigations led them to uncover countless examples of how the inhibiting authority of tradition obscured the truth. They perceived the appeal to history and its traditions as a flight from the truly scientific application of an experimental method. They championed the freedom of human reason over against the prejudices of tradition.<sup>9</sup> To assert the existence of a historical decline of tradition, a decline seen “from the perspective of a tradition,” would be, in the eyes of an Enlightenment thinker, to compromise the truth of the assertion.

Gadamer encounters this objection directly. He speaks of the attempt by the Enlightenment to free itself from prejudice as itself a prejudice: “The fundamental prejudice of the Enlightenment is the prejudice against prejudice itself, which deprives tradition of its power.”<sup>10</sup> Gadamer draws here an indirect parallel between tradition and prejudice. To deny the validity of all prejudice, that is, to devalue every prejudgment which can be made, is to impoverish the idea of tradition. But tradition, defined as that complex of object and authoritative transmission which never comes fully to consciousness, cannot be so easily devalued. It shapes human judgment by providing the basis for and the context within which judgments are made. It disposes the human being toward some things and against others.

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<sup>9</sup> Thus Gadamer (Wahrheit und Methode, p. 255) cites Leo Strauss: “Das Wort ‘Vorurteil’ ist der angemessenste Ausdruck für das grosse Wollen der Aufklärung, für den Willen zu freier, unbefangener Prüfung; Vorurteil ist das eindeutige polemische Korrelat des allzuvieldeutigen Worts ‘Freiheit.’” Die Religionskritik Spinozas Theologisch-Politischen Traktat (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1930), p. 163. Spinoza's Critique of Religion, trans. E.M. Sinclair (New York: Schocken Books, 1965) p. 178.

<sup>10</sup> “Dies grundlegende Vorurteil der Aufklärung ist das Vorurteil gegen die Vorurteile überhaupt und damit die Entmachtung der Überlieferung.” Wahrheit und Methode, p. 255 (trans.: pp. 239-240).

This preliminary glimpse of tradition brings us to the next questions which we must consider: to what extent is tradition a prejudice? To what extent can one free oneself from tradition and prejudice? And, insofar as a perfect liberty from the two is impossible to achieve, to what extent was the Enlightenment's rallying cry of liberty a misguided one?

### I. 3. Tradition and Prejudice

It is common today to define prejudice as an error which persists despite evidence to the contrary. Indeed, this is what distinguishes prejudice, in our everyday understanding, from prejudgment. The prejudgment becomes a prejudice if, even in the light of new evidence, it is not rectified.<sup>11</sup> In this respect, the distinction between the two terms takes on a moral coloring. Prejudgments are normal errors which one corrects when they become known as erroneous. Prejudices, on the contrary, are those errors which people cling to, regardless of the fact that they seemingly know better. The one who clings to prejudices, according to this understanding, lives in bad faith. Such a person refuses to acknowledge the apparent evidence of a scientific truth. This is the point of moral judgment. If one were not prejudiced, one would acknowledge erroneous opinions, and they would, by consequence, be consigned to the category of prejudgments.

The understanding of prejudice sketched above presupposes that one gains knowledge in a conscious and scientific way. The acquisition is scientific insofar as it has to do with evidence. A prejudgment yields to evidence; a prejudice does not. And it is a conscious acquisition insofar as it consists in the deliberate formulation, expression, and testing of a hypothesis. One could even say that, if an opinion is not consciously expressed – that is, submitted to the judgment of competent authorities, who then compare it with the nature it attempts to describe – then it hardly counts as knowledge. This is a commonplace of modern thought. True knowledge, in this view, is that which we deliberately thematize for the purpose of scientific testing. If it cannot be thematized, it is mysticism. If it cannot be tested, it is metaphysics.

#### I.3.A. Jankowitz' Critique of Prejudice-Free Thought

Such an understanding of prejudice, however, neglects the undiscussed assumptions, the unexpressed and undisputed givens, which can never be fully plumbed and upon which all knowledge rests. It fails to acknowledge the realm of those prejudices which do not come to light because they have not been thematized. Such an incomplete understanding of prejudice is regarded as trivial by Wolf-Günther Jankowitz, who studied with Gadamer in Heidelberg. In his book, Philosophie und Vorurteil, Jankowitz defines prejudice not as an opinion which should be judged erroneous, but as that which is self-evidently true. The key expression is the adjective, self-evident. The self-evident is given in language and tradition, and remains unquestioned because it is not

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<sup>11</sup> Gordon W. Allport, The Nature of Prejudice (Cambridge, Mass.:Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., Inc., 1954), p. 9.

fully realized in consciousness.<sup>12</sup> No one disputes it, and it seems therefore to require no investigation. A tacit consensus, a web of undiscussed and largely unrealized assumptions, supports what is accepted as common knowledge.

This is a kind of prejudice, because it involves judgments made on the basis of common sense, judgments made before those conscious judgments which are deliberately debated. Jankowitz' concept of prejudice as the realm of the self-evident opens up a new dimension of the word. By contrast, the more common understanding of prejudice – that of an error which one refuses to correct – can be called trivial, at least in terms of philosophical logic. It accepts as self-evident the notion of error, and consequently the notion of truth.

Jankowitz is important for the present investigation, first of all, because he defines prejudice in terms of tradition. The prejudice which exists because it is self-evidently true is met, as Jankowitz says, in language and tradition. These, he explains, are prejudice structures: one meets in them the fundamental prejudice that, in language, one can encounter what is true, and that in tradition, history offers a source for true reflection.<sup>13</sup>

Only the committed skeptic contends that language and history are useless for knowledge. And even the skeptics articulate their skeptical opinions about tradition in the languages which tradition has preserved. To that extent, then, the use of human speech is always an expression of faith in the self-evident capacity of language to communicate. And because any expression implies a prejudgment about one's ability to express, it can be called a prejudice. Prejudice and tradition are linked because both have to do, as Jankowitz says, with what is self-evidently true.

One cannot form a judgment about an expressed truth without the self-evident structure of language. A similar point can be made about tradition: one cannot form a judgment about the truth of a tradition without a self-evident tradition or viewpoint from which the judgment is to be made. The prejudice-structures of language and tradition are thus not only unavoidable. On the contrary, as Jankowitz has shown, they are indispensable. Without the "prejudice" of language, one could not even draw attention to the word "prejudice" itself. And without the prejudice of tradition, one would have no viewpoint, perspective, or school of thought, from which a historical judgment could be made.

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<sup>12</sup> "Da diese nicht bewusst mitvollzogen werden, sei es erlaubt, von dem Selbstverständlichen, . . . als dem 'Vorurteil' zu sprechen." Wolf-Günther Jankowitz, Philosophie und Vorurteil. Untersuchungen zur Vorurteilshaftigkeit von Philosophie als Propädeutik einer Philosophie des Vorurteils (Meisenheim am Glan: Verlag Anton Hain, 1975), p. 3.

<sup>13</sup> "Die traditionsreichen Einzelsprachen existieren als nicht hintergehbare Vorurteilsstrukturen." Ibid. 27.

This positive conception of prejudice is the second aspect of Jankowitz' thought that is of importance to the present investigation. He traces the modern history of the concept of prejudice, from the Renaissance and Enlightenment thinkers (such as Bacon, Descartes, and Kant) who sought to free themselves from prejudice, to the nineteenth and twentieth century thinkers (such as Hegel, Heidegger, and Gadamer) who perceived the unavoidability of prejudice. Jankowitz' analysis suggests that the fortunes of prejudice and tradition have waxed and waned together. It follows that, in order to gain a positive understanding of these terms, one must reach back into history for a time before they fell into disfavor. From this early, positive understanding, the subsequent decline of the concepts of prejudice and tradition can be more clearly seen.

### I.3.B. Etymology of Prejudice

In the Latin language, the double aspect of prejudice – its positive and negative import – is apparent. *Praeiudicium* contains a variety of shades of meaning: it is (1) a prior or preliminary judgment, (2) a legal precedent, and (3) an adverse preconception. This last definition is identical with our common, negative understanding of the word, but it is only the third definition in the Oxford Latin Dictionary. More important for the present argument are the first and second definitions, in which the word has a precise legal meaning and connotes something positive.

Cicero, who uses the word in all three shades of meaning, offers a particularly good example of the positive second sense. In 70 B.C., he prosecuted the case of one Verres, the Governor of Sicily, who was accused of extortion. Verres' henchman, Apronius, was charged with the crime of robbery accompanied by violence or intimidation. The local magistrate, Lucius Metellus, received an application to prosecute Apronius. But Metellus, according to Cicero, refused the case. He was unwilling, by allowing the minor case to be heard, to prejudice the more important case against Verres by a judgment against his lieutenant, Apronius.<sup>14</sup> The prejudice in this matter is perfectly justified, according to Cicero. He leaves no doubt that both Verres and Apronius are guilty. But the legitimate procedure against Apronius – the *praeiudicium* here – might have had a damaging effect on Verres' case. It was refused, not because it was erroneous, but because it was impolitic. This legal sense of the word prejudice has persisted in the French language up to the present day.<sup>15</sup>

Such an etymological analysis of prejudice brings out clearly the positive aspect of the word. It suggests that there are legitimate as well as illegitimate prejudices, and the inference can be drawn that traditions, taken in the sense of pre-disposing viewpoints or schools of thought, can be legitimate or illegitimate as well. On this level, however,

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<sup>14</sup> “Non impetrat, cum hoc diceret Metellus, praeiudicium se de capite C. Verris per hoc iudicium nolle fieri.” Cicero *In verrem* 3.152.

<sup>15</sup> Thus Gadamer can state that there are “préjugés légitimes.” *Wahrheit und Methode*, p. 255 (translation: p. 240).

both prejudice and tradition exist as conscious understandings. Cicero's Metellus is aware of his prejudice against Verres, just as he is aware of the tradition of Roman law within which he stands. An analysis of the Latin root of prejudice brings us closer to the positive meaning of the word, but does not suggest the mysterious and unconscious workings of a prejudice or tradition within the human heart. It does not suggest the compelling power which is effective precisely because it can never be fully understood. For a glimpse of this, one must turn to the Greeks.

Ancient Greece, Jankowitz mentions in passing,<sup>16</sup> used two words to convey the idea of prejudice. An analysis of these words, *ἡ οἰσις* (opinion) and *ἡ ὑποφία* (suspicion), reveals that neither one can be restricted to our common understanding of prejudice as that which is erroneous. To be sure, the first of the two connotes what we commonly understand by prejudice. Aristotle, for example, speaks in his *Poetics* of the prejudices of critics, who substitute their own preconceptions for the real meaning of a poet's verse. They unjustly censure the poet, not for what the poet actually says, but for being inconsistent, for departing from what they have inferred from their own notion of the poetic verses.<sup>17</sup> One can almost translate Aristotle's word, *οἰσσει*, as "false interpretation." But this negative concept of the word is only a secondary one. Plato, in his *Phaedrus*, uses the word *οἰσις* in a neutral sense. There the word refers to the purely human opinions which, for example, seers acquire from a study of the signs of birds, in contrast to the divine insights given to the madly inspired prophets or mantics.<sup>18</sup> This is not prejudice as we commonly understand it. Rather, it seems to be an apparently sound thought or opinion, acquired by legitimate means. Art, not error, gives rise to it.

An even more positive origin of the concept of prejudice can be seen in the word *ὑποφία*. Plato uses this word in the *Lysis* to refer to a valid suspicion. Socrates, in his conversation with Lysis and Menexenus, believes that he has arrived at an adequate definition of friendship. But all of a sudden, he says, a suspicion comes into his mind. He does not know from where the suspicion came, but it suggests to him that his conclusions about friendship are not true.<sup>19</sup> As the dialogue develops, we see that there

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<sup>16</sup> Jankowitz, p. 5.

<sup>17</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics* 1461b. Here the word *οἰσσει* is very close to prejudice, referring to the improbable presumption upon which an improper syllogism is based.

<sup>18</sup> In ancient days, Socrates says, "The prophet attained understanding and information by a purely human activity of thought belonging to his own intelligence." *Phaedrus* 244c, trans. R. Hackforth, in Plato, *The Collected Dialogues of Plato including the Letters*, edited (1961) by Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, with Introduction and Prefatory Notes, Bollingen Series LXXI, ninth printing (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978). In this case, the concept of *οἰσσει* ("activity of thought") is dependent upon the intelligence which provides understanding and information.

<sup>19</sup> Socrates says, "There came into my mind, from what quarter I cannot tell, the strangest sort of suspicion." *Lysis* 218c, trans J. Wright, in Plato, *The Collected Dialogues*

are rational grounds for suspecting falseness in Socrates' first conclusion. The truth of the matter is based upon the principle that friendship occurs when two people are alike, and Socrates had already established that opposites make the greatest friends. But this logic appears only gradually. Although the suspicion of which Socrates speaks is rationally grounded, the source of it remains mysterious. This illustrates, for our purposes, two aspects of the meaning of prejudice. A prejudice cannot, on the one hand, be fully explained. But it is, on the other hand, of real significance for truth.

An important inference can be drawn from this about tradition. Tradition is like the suspicion or prejudice of Socrates in that it, too, cannot be fully explained. One can no more grasp the tradition in which one stands than one can fully explicate the momentary flashes of insight which guide decisions in daily life. These momentary flashes spring up, to mix a metaphor, from a seed-bed of which only the top few inches have been deliberately tilled. What lies deeper is unknown, but remains a root and a source.

The same can be said about tradition. It also is a root and a source and, while one can always provide a rationale for the truths which tradition offers for reflection, the rationale does not suffice for a full explanation of those truths. This much can be surmised from an etymological analysis of prejudice. Its link to tradition suggests that both prejudice and tradition are as indispensable as they are unavoidable.

This positive understanding, which endured (as Gadamer states) in the influence of Greek ethics upon Christian moral philosophy, began to give way in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In that period, the hope was awakened that human beings could free themselves from prejudice and tradition, from all that hindered human understanding, by means of a scientific, experimental method. This method would emancipate humanity from the past. Jankowitz' investigation, however, has suggested that a thoroughgoing emancipation from prejudice is an illusion. One can only free oneself from prejudice and tradition to the extent that one can thematize them, bring them to consciousness, exorcise them in a deliberate way. And it is of the nature of prejudice and tradition that they can never come fully to consciousness. Thus we begin to see that the liberty sought in the early years of the Enlightenment, a liberty which obscured the positive and necessary understanding of prejudice and tradition, was impossible to achieve.

Nevertheless, the rallying cry of liberty was, however limited and incomplete, a genuine one. The thinkers who will be treated in the next section, Bacon, Descartes and Kant, all struggled for the emancipation from prejudice. Gadamer identifies them as forerunners of aesthetic consciousness and romantic hermeneutics, and in that capacity they contributed to the decline of tradition.

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including the Letters. Socrates' suspicion is strange or out-of-the-way, but that does not invalidate it.

Yet each of them added to our understanding of how human beings acquire knowledge. Bacon showed how experiences are shaped by tradition as they are taken up into thought. Descartes gave a task to subsequent thinkers, the task of uniting the mathematical knowledge of nature with metaphysics, and this problem exercises philosophers to this day. Kant showed how the common sense, given by tradition, plays a role in both aesthetic judgment and moral philosophy.

Each of these thinkers, it must be said, made their contribution as an emancipatory act, aiming at the liberation of thought from the harmful prejudices of metaphysics and scholasticism. Yet each contributed indirectly to a positive understanding of tradition. The goal of the next stage of the present investigation is a delicate one. It is, on the one hand, to take seriously the critique offered by these thinkers, a critique which led to tradition's decline. But, on the other hand, the goal is to affirm the insight of philosophical hermeneutics, that everyone stands within a tradition which can no more be fully plumbed than it can be dispensed with.