

Traditions originate, presumably, as a result of attempts to answer vital questions—questions that are vital for the human beings who originate and perpetuate the traditions. Traditions continue, then, presumably, as long as they are taken (or mistaken) to answer the vital questions of the succeeding generations of human beings who perpetuate them—if not simply because of cultural inertia or because they can be conveniently co-opted for some noncommunicative, merely strategic purposes. But insofar as traditions originate and are perpetuated as answers to vital questions, they are always subject to critical appropriation by employing the ultimate, or primal, criteria implicit in the basic questions, the basic suppositions, and the open commitments underlying them.

All ordinary critical inquiry is no doubt inquiry within some tradition, in terms of its consuetudinary standards and practices. But any such tradition can itself be appropriated critically by engaging in the extraordinary practice of "discourse," or "critical reflection," and thereby employing the relevant ultimate, or primal, standards.

The most basic suppositions of all inquiry are arguably matters of faith. But, as Collingwood argues, the faith in this case is a universal, rational faith, as distinct from any of the particular, historical faiths that emerge in the course of inquiry as answers to our basic questions. Moreover, as Whitehead emphasizes, and Christian confirms, even the basic suppositions that are matters of faith are themselves "suggested" by experience at the deepest level.

2 March 2009