**Abstract: Tradition and progress – A pragmatist proposal**

Tradition is often regarded as being opposed to progress, as backward-looking and irrational. Yet, there are communities all around the world which attach a high value to their traditions. Can the gap between these perspectives be bridged? In this paper I would like to revisit the concept of tradition and propose a notion of progress which can do without the dualistic opposition between traditional and modern. The first part of the paper will deal with a conceptualization of tradition based on a Deweyan concept of habit. In the second part, I will show how traditions can be open to critical scrutiny and evaluation. In the third part, I will construct a pragmatist notion of progress which builds on the evaluation of existing traditions.

Firstly, I will conceptualize *cultural tradition* in terms of the habits by the means of which culture is being transmitted or received. For this purpose, I will employ John Dewey´s concept of habit as a kind of human activity “which is projective, dynamic in quality, ready for overt manifestation; and which is operative in some subdued subordinate form even when not obviously dominating activity” (Dewey 1922). This conception of *cultural tradition* will be distinguished from other kinds of tradition, like *scientific traditions* on the one hand or *private traditions* on the other. The concept will further be specified by connecting it to the notion of identity.

Secondly, I will provide an account of how traditions can be rationally assessed. Since Max Weber´s characterization of tradition as “ingrained habituation” (Weber 1978), it has been commonly regarded as irrational. But Weber´s account cannot explain the phenomenon of traditions which are consciously being transmitted to younger generations. Once we admit that traditions can be open to critical scrutiny and evaluation, there are two possibilities: On the one hand, traditions can be conceptualized as “something that we can criticize and change” (Popper 1989) from the outside. On the other hand, they can be said to possess “a logic and efficacy on their own” (Marglin 1990) which can only be criticized from the inside. I will show how an account of *cultural tradition* based on habits can do justice to insights from both positions.

In a third and last step, I will construct a pragmatist notion of progress in which *cultural traditions* are modified and enriched with the results of their critical evaluation. In order to steer a middle way between cultural relativism and universalism, I will make use of Philipp Kitcher´s distinction between “local and global progress” (Kitcher 2011). The resulting concept will integrate a general trust in tradition with a fallibilist attitude.

Keywords: tradition, progress, habit, pragmatism, culture

**References:**

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