

The Wednesday

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Weekly Magazine of the Wednesday Group - Oxford

Editorial

The Crises of Representational Thought

Philosophy seems to have ignored all talk about a crisis and carried on with its usual business. However, the crisis may be ignored but it will keep coming back. Charles Taylor once considered the reason for such a crisis and put the blame on 'representational thinking', that there is a world out there and we have an idea of it in our minds. This gave philosophy from Descartes' time until now a wide-ranging debate on the mind-body problem, scepticism and what are known as the 'external world' and 'other minds' problems. But Charles Taylor and philosophers who are close to phenomenology and hermeneutics see little value in questioning our relationship to the world and other minds.

In his contribution to *After Philosophy: End or Transformation?*, a collection of articles responding to the challenges facing philosophy, Charles Taylor inquired into the challenges facing epistemology and found that some of the criticism has been directed towards foundationalism. Epistemology has been understood to a large extent as the task of investigating validity. The discovery of knowledge has been left to science, while philosophy has been turned into a specialised science, one that is charged with providing the conditions for the truth and validity at the basis of science itself. Philosophy becomes an instrument for science. But the criticism Taylor spends much time on is representationalism. He argues that representationalism gained from the success of science but it only works if there are more presuppositions involved and these are anthropological beliefs about human agents and moral assumptions.

Taylor specifies three assumptions involved in epistemology understood as representation: the disengaged subject from the natural and social worlds, the punctual view of the self, ideally ready as free and rational to treat these worlds instrumentally, and finally, 'an atomistic construal of society as constituted by, or ultimately to be explained in

terms of, individual purposes'. It is clear from this description of the presuppositions that the critique of the epistemological tradition 'is connected with most important moral or spiritual ideas of our civilization...'

Taylor goes on to show that the challenge to the epistemological tradition is a direct challenge to its presuppositions and hence the critique will provide a set of new conditions for a future or alternative epistemology. He relies heavily on continental thinkers, from Hegel to Wittgenstein, but not without challenging some of the more recent continental alternatives from structuralist and post-structuralist thinkers. Heidegger has shown that we are 'already engaged in coping with our world, dealing with things in it, at grips with them'. We are acting in the world in both the theoretical as well as the practical spheres 'realising a certain form of life'. Merleau-Ponty 'shows how our agency is essentially embodied' and the body is a locus of directions of actions and desires beyond our control. Heidegger shows that 'Dasein's world is defined by the related purposes of a certain way of life shared with others'. The importance of society was also emphasised by these thinkers, and also in Wittgenstein's rejection of a private language. Language has been recognised as communal since the work of Herder and Humboldt.

Taylor's diagnosis of the crisis of epistemology in its foundational and representational forms and his responses take epistemology beyond the way it has previously been taught and discussed. It gives more weight to the epistemic sphere and shows that a change of epistemology is effectively a change in a world-view, from theoretical disengagement to practical involvement. But what will this mean for science and for the technological approach to the modern world? Could we modify one or the other or could we modify both? More discussion is needed.

The Editor

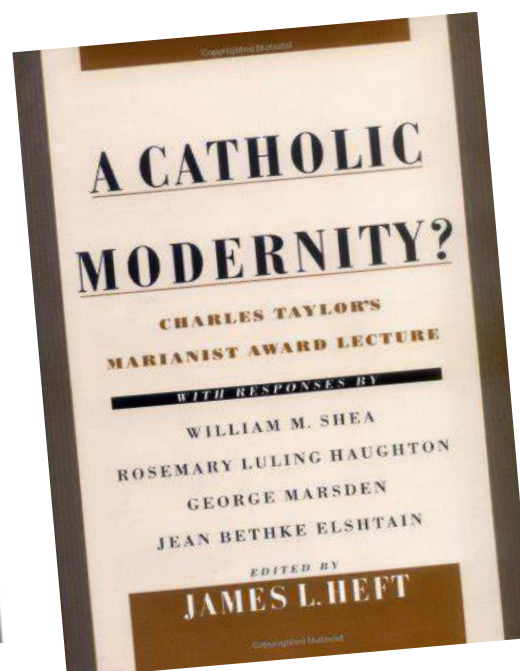
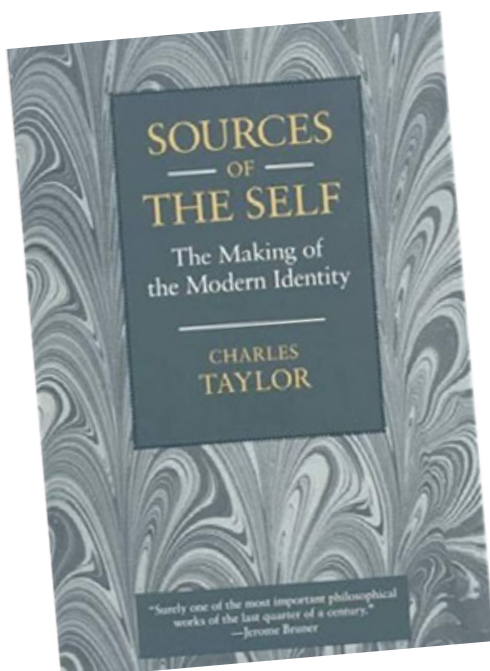
Religious Imagination & Aesthetics In Politics

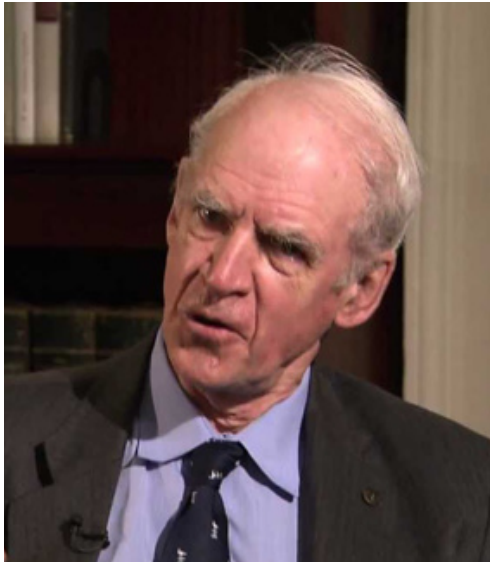
The *Wikipedia* page on Charles Taylor and Ruth Abbey's edited collection of papers by different authors 2004 *Charles Taylor: An Introduction*, are both good. Hopefully my account will be less technical, more user friendly and naturally emphasise themes I found more interesting. Taylor, Ricoeur, Benjamin and Arendt all contribute ideas one might associate with aesthetic politics.

DAVID CLOUGH

Taylor (now 89) played a role in Quebec's multicultural issues thirteen years ago. At this time Richard Rorty called Taylor one of the twelve leading philosophers then alive. Taylor published *A Secular Age* which won him the Templeton Prize. But I want to concentrate on his earlier work, particularly his two works from 1989, the widely cited *Sources of the Self* and a work started then but only published four years ago called *The Language Animal*. This latter work reveals a possibly posthumous respect for the work of Paul Ricoeur. Ricoeur doesn't feature that much in what one might call 'classic Taylor' but in this work he seems to develop Ricoeur's ideas in his book *The Course of Recognition*. Ricoeur becomes much more prominent for Taylor. The reasons for this are perhaps hinted at in what follows.

The *Wikipedia* article decides not to discuss *The Language Animal*. It is not 'classic Taylor' I suppose but there are other books it doesn't discuss either. His work on Hegel is one key book. Like Macintyre who is perhaps closer to Thomist thought, Taylor was a Catholic who tries to integrate Hegel, Marx and Heidegger. They were less critical of Hegel and continental thought in the seventies than other Anglophone philosophers. Another achievement in early Taylor is the topic explored in his *Philosophical Papers* - his strong and weak evaluations, primary and secondary, which leads on to other philosophers like Harry Frankfurt. Later Taylor will offer an influential communitarian critique of liberalism as utilitarianism. In Taylor's view Hobbes, Locke, Rawls and Dworkin are deficient in this respect.





Charles Taylor



Paul Ricoeur

Ricoeur has some reservations about Rawlsian proceduralism, he debates recognition with Honneth and has some Hegelian inheritance but is less explicitly communitarian as such.

If Taylor still seems more German and interested in Gadamer and the Frankfurt school than Ricoeur, *A Catholic Modernity* (2004) created more explicit controversy. Ian Fraser in particular attacked it from a Marxist perspective. He felt Bloch and Adorno were sufficient. Taylor's pupil the Australian Ruth Abbey responded (below). William Connelly also felt Taylor's religious views, almost but not quite, undermine his liberal pluralism. My comment would be that whether Taylor was influenced by Dewey or not he does not really cover the French and Freudian aspects as thoroughly as Ricoeur. But I also follow certain suggestions in medieval studies that the romanticism Taylor posits with Rousseau, and maybe then Goethe and Schiller, overlooks the fourteenth and fifteenth century religious mystical writings, Abbe Suger, Bernard of Clairvaux, troubadours and female mystics like the Beguines, a point discussed significantly in Lacan and Kristeva. On the other hand, Taylor's account is still fairly typical after Weber or even Foucault.

The 1991 *Malaise of Modernity* led to others using 'melancholic freedom' or 'sticky ontology' as opposed to strong or weak versions. But up to this time Taylor did not self-identify arguably as religious as strongly as Ricoeur and MacIntyre had done. But events such as September 2001 would change this. Judith Butler and postmodern theologians started to discuss the public return of visible religion. Some of this could be related back

to Foucault looking at Iran in 1979.

Taylor, in *A Catholic Modernity?*, still advocates striving beyond life. But in Wikipedia's description of his arguments in the earlier *Sources of the Self* near the end it talks about the familiar theme of ordinary or everyday life and the conflicts of modernity. Taylor says that rationalist critiques of romanticism often forget that they too seek fulfilment and expressiveness. But in the way typical of recent theology Taylor sees hope in theism and its promise of divine affirmation of the merely human, beyond life or just this life. Shades of NT Wright and other modern theologians. I also tried to play off the modernist epiphanies Taylor describes with Ricoeur's more forward projecting possibilities in the buried or unkept future of past potentials.

Aesthetic Politics

Stephan Moses writes about Benjamin in his book *The Angel of History* and says in reality, the thwarted hopes of past generations are the soil on which we build our dreams. But in the *Arcades Project*, Benjamin turns his back on the future rather as he imagines the angel is doing in the picture by Paul Klee. Sudden eruptions of memory in Bergson and Proust translate Benjamin's historical ontology into an aesthetic political and theological one.

Ian Fraser quotes Steiner's introduction to the *Origin of German Tragic Drama* to the effect that although both Benjamin and Taylor share affinities Benjamin's own retrieval of visions of transcendence through redemptive critique



Rancière



Macintyre

lead us towards modern art in a similar way, and Taylor's use of Pound and TS Eliot is similar. Benjamin shares with them, more than Taylor does, the tendency towards Collage or Montage. Bloch also has similarities. Taylor stresses a civic humanist tradition of freedom after Tocqueville and Arendt. Taylor and Ricoeur together are also often presented as potential sources of a new kind of rethought religious humanism.

Arendt's political reading of Kant's third critique is after Benjamin another source of aesthetic politics. Ricoeur's essay on Charles Taylor's *Sources of the Self* in *Reflections on the Just*, after his turn to Rawls in *The Just* of 1994, talks of the buried promise of political ideas. While this looks back to ideas of fulfilled biblical prophecy, Ricoeur actually references Walter Benjamin, Paul Valéry and the unkept future of the past. The idea of 'promising' here also relates back to Arendt and before that Nietzsche. Later Ricoeur will look at memory, forgetting and forgiveness referencing these two figures again but ending with the paradox of Benjamin's angel of History.

With regard to his discussion of literature in other books, Fraser is not really a literary critic but see also Ian Fraser's *Political Theory and Film from Adorno to Zizek*, which critically examines how radical political theory and its application to film analysis can provide insight to the aesthetic self during political upheaval and conflict. *Turning and Spinning* is Abbey's response to Ian Fraser.

Charles Taylor's work has recently taken a religious turn, with Taylor becoming more explicit about his own religious faith and its influence on his thinking. Ian Fraser offers a systematic, critical exploration of the nature of Taylor's Catholicism as it appears in his writings. This reply to Fraser endorses his belief in the importance of looking carefully at Taylor's religious views. However, it raises doubts about some of Fraser's particular arguments and conclusions and aims to foster a clearer understanding of Taylor's religious beliefs. It poses questions for Fraser about what Taylor is setting out to do in *A Catholic Modernity*? Why does he invoke the figure of Matteo Ricci? Does he believe that acts of practical benevolence are impossible without a religious foundation, and does his religiously inspired pluralism suffer an inherent contradiction? After this outed 'confessional' stage and its argumentation *A Secular Age* emerges. It seems more accepting of the reality of secularism, though I still struggled with that myself. But Taylor was responding to the so-called 'post-secular stage' where religion or religious identity at least had returned to the public stage and legal frameworks. But where one religious sociologist, Peter L Berger, had relaxed his original secularisation thesis, and was in a similar position to Taylor, another, Steve Bruce, if anything intensified it, predicting perhaps a bit ironically now that only the Catholic Church would survive. Taylor and Berger were more interested in the growth of Protestants and Pentecostals.

Ten years ago, Taylor published a set of essays reflecting on aspects of his work called *Dilemmas and Connections*. In *Iris Murdoch and Moral Philosophy* Taylor admits the influence of Iris Murdoch's *Sovereignty of the Good* when he wrote *Sources of the Self*. This I wanted to hold fast too. But here he can criticise her ontological disproof of God in her later *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*. There are a multiplicity of paths Taylor argues. In *Understanding the Other* Taylor follows Gadamer in stressing that dialogue is prior to science.

The latest of Taylor's books to appear is *The Language Animal*. It is in two parts but only the first was published. Towards the end of the book, there are quite a few Ricoeur references but I suspect it is in volume two, whenever it appears, that Taylor's own version of the themes in Time and Narrative might be clearer. My worry about Taylor is that his thoughts fit with so much else, Wittgenstein in particular. The social seems to determine too much perhaps. but that could be his Hegelianism too. Taylor draws on Hamann, Humboldt and Herder as a contrast to Hobbes, Locke and Condillac. In *Sources of the Self* romanticism remains a moral source, but is this as Platonic as I wanted it to be? Speaking and articulation may help us develop new insights but is it the good of Plato or of Aristotle?

As mentioned, philosophical politics responds to world events through literature. The French have looked at their poets, Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Mallarmé and their great nineteenth Century novelists, the Russians too, but we have Shakespeare, Dickens, and metaphysical poets who perhaps seem less revolutionary though they may not be. Our Romantic poets on the other hand and socialist art movements are a different story. Marx did most of his writing in Paris and the UK. His birthplace in Trier was in the Alsace border country. Benjamin in particular looks at French writers. More obviously so do figures like Sartre, Kristeva and Rancière.

Kompridis published an anthology called *Philosophical Romanticism* where Taylor joins Robert Pippin, Hayden White and Stanley Cavell and other figures discussing a kind of aesthetic politics. Cavell puts Emerson firmly in the mix of romantic moral sources. Rancière was debating forms of aesthetic politics with Butler, Critchley, Žižek and Badiou. While this is more obviously



W. von Humboldt

left-wing than Ricoeur, Taylor or MacIntyre, Rancière still draws on Benjamin and Arendt. However, this movement may have subsided over the last five years.

How Romantic is Rancière? The web says that the recent wave of interest in the work of Jacques Rancière in North America can likely be traced back to the unique status he gives to the category of the aesthetic in its relation to the political. Coming after the exhaustion of debates surrounding the notion of 'aesthetic' ideology, and expressing dissatisfaction with familiar arguments about the aestheticization of politics, Rancière's oeuvre seems to offer the promise of a critical theory that develops an entirely novel understanding of the history of the relation between aesthetics and politics. It promises, among other things, to revitalize the study of literature as a privileged form of intervention into established modes of expression. Rancière weds aesthetics and politics through a particular reading of Romanticism. According to him, the early nineteenth century saw the invention of a form of literature that proved capable of articulating a new relationship between the aesthetic and the ground of the political community, or *polis*—the *arche* of politics itself. The articulation of this *arche* brings to the fore a part of the *polis* that had hitherto not been able to articulate itself, thereby suggesting that the foundation of the political is never stable or timeless, but always in the process of reinvention.

Impressions of *A Secular Age*

Charles Taylor's book *A Secular Age* was published in 2010. He provides an interesting historical analysis of the secularization of Western society. Why in 1500 was it virtually impossible not to believe in God, but in 2000 many of us find disbelief in God easy and unquestionable? The following article gives the main points in the book that impressed me.

PAUL COCKBURN

Taylor examines the enchanted world of medieval times. Meaning existed outside of us and involves us. Our minds are porous, open to attack from external influences. Medicine for medieval man involved a change where the spiritual and physical changed together.

In the medieval world we were connected in a deep way to the non-human world: storms, famines etc. are acts of God, not just instances of exceptionless laws, which is what science tells us they are. In fact, we cannot take this disinterested scientific attitude into the realm of our dealings and interactions with others. This area of personal interaction is in fact dominated by agency, will power, charisma etc.

The porous world was also social. Forces affected society as a whole: humanity has to be united, the harvest could be ruined by one apostate or heretic malignly altering the whole balance of nature. So, society was intolerant, and orthodoxy was crucial: the system could not function without faith in spiritual forces. There were rules, social practices etc. which had to be obeyed. (This strict code needed 'inversion' sometimes, ceremonies like boy bishops, the fool being king for a day, and festivals. Contradictory principles need to be held together psychologically: order needs the energy of chaos or energy drains out of it over time.)

In terms of religion the political and everyday structures of medieval power were continually

challenged by the 'higher' structures of religious or spiritual power, but the higher spiritual power cannot replace the established world order, it is too 'other-worldly'. Laws and codes however can leave no room for contradiction so that extremes are imposed.

The church during the year had festivals which participate in God's 'eternity' as the events in Christ's life 'repeated' every year. There was a sense of 'kairos' time, time marked by significant events, such as the birth of Christ at Christmas and the Crucifixion at Easter. Modern man has perhaps lost this sense of time, of resonances over time. We now exist partially in a secular modern 'scientific' time - a precious resource that we must not waste, or life is 'lessened' somehow. We must pack as much experience as we can in - rather than waiting for the right time to do things or preparing ourselves.

We have moved from a medieval cosmos, which is ordered, hierarchical, and gives shape to our lives, and has meaning for us, to a universe of scientific and mechanical laws which originally showed God's glory in the 'book of nature'. As the domain of science grew ever larger, belief in God was discarded leaving only scientific laws which can seem meaningless to many as they do not involve human values.

The mechanical world picture was popularised by Descartes, he thought we can put our willed actions into effect in a simple technological way, with our passions under the control

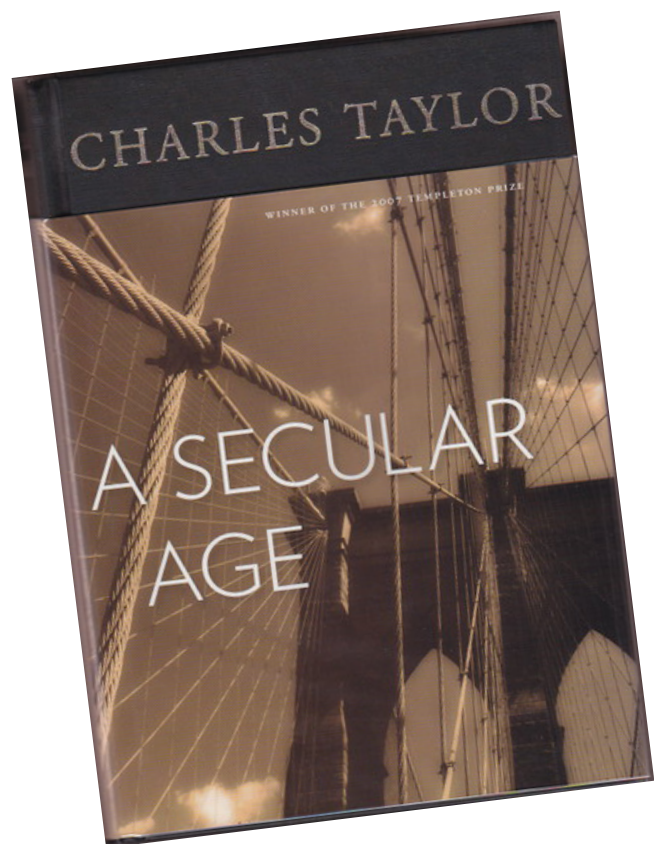
of the will in Stoical fashion. We become disengaged, and as we are enlightened by science we become an observer, a spectator, and an experimenter. Science reinforces materialism, and God gradually disappears in a rational mind-storm. Deism with its rational basis removed the need for God to intervene in the world.

Taylor gives a much more detailed analysis of the history of the loss of faith than can be given in this short article. He deals with how the crisis of faith in later centuries continues, but we can 'fast-forward' to the early 20th century.

The effect of the First World War was fairly definitive in killing off the warrior ethic (the 2nd World War re-emphasizes the concept of a just war, and there will always be macho men). The incompetency of the generals, the awful new technology of war, and the lack of a true cause to die for once patriotism was exposed as hollow, was devastating for the post-war generation. So, we are forever cut off mostly from our predecessors for whom the theatre of war was noble, glorious, a way of fulfilment.

T.S. Eliot in his poem *The Waste Land* published in 1922 captures the despair as the old moral order disintegrates. The old order is shattered, there is no glorious history of the British nation, even Shakespeare is largely outdated.

The vast space of the universe and the aeons of time discovered by science have had a disastrous effect on the imagination. In pre-history the imagination would not have been 'split off', it would have been part of normal life. You did not have to keep 'verifying' to find out what was true or real, thereby killing the imagination. The truth was in your imagination, whether that was personal or tribal. But now we have to say 'I am imagining now', it is a separate activity which is not real in some way but maybe it is just as real!



In Taylor's view the religious vacuum or search for meaning is now filled by the aesthetic, 'nature' religion, or self-affirmation'. However, he is writing from a Catholic viewpoint, and he thinks science has been so successful we have forgotten the 'big' questions such as the nature of transcendence, and what is the meaning of life. Perhaps we somehow need to regain the sense of connectedness, wholeness and unity which the medieval world-view contained. Scientific methodology tends to break down whatever is being studied into smaller and smaller parts, and has little to say about the big questions, as it is mainly concerned with second-order mechanistic processes and mathematical analysis. We should not forget the big questions of life. In being human, we live in a space of questions, and how we live is in a sense how we answer these questions in some way.

Scent

Who are you, inconceivable delight?
How do you find me unexpectedly
and strike my inner core intensively
revolving in a world that has lost sight?

The lover so close in the night
is far from it, for you alone
are closeness in the dark and unbeknown
with hidden rainbow colours out of sight.

Between the shadows and the dawning gleam
You float unheard, unseen, enrapturing
the night-bound dreams until you land within
a silent heart 's alive and flowing stream.

He who sees music in a mirror's glance
would know and name you, if he had the chance.



Poem and Artwork by Scharlie Meeuws

Poetry and Politics: a Rhymester's Riposte



CHRIS NORRIS

Blessed be all metrical rules that forbid automatic responses, force us to have second thoughts, free from the fetters of Self.

W.H. Auden

I see these days, in young aspiring poets, a phenomenal complacency regarding form, a prejudice that allows them to arrive at adulthood having been convinced somehow that rhyme and metre and pattern are things of the past.

People who use 'formalist' as an insult think poets who use metre are counting crotchets when in fact we're passing through bars.

Glyn Maxwell

You say: 'why such formality, why hedge
Your riffs with rhyme or dull your satire's edge?
Why those ornate verse-structures, what the need
For rhyming couplets, closure guaranteed?
Why your prosodic etiquette, why such
Desire to renovate the classic touch?
What point all that palaver if your aim's
To shoot the opposition down in flames?
Back then rhymed satire was a boxer's bell,
Got up their noses, conjured merry hell,
And irked the ruling class that some poor hack
Could outperform the dumb-ass lordling pack.
They'd fume and threaten while you'd see them off
With lines to silence any fuckwit toff.

But that was centuries ago when rhyme
 And metre were the fashion of the time,
 Verse mastery strode on strict iambic feet,
 And pulses craved an even five-bar beat.
 Then it was satire's proper job to show
 How prosody could shake the status quo,
 Or an ear-perfect couplet wipe the floor
 With posh dim poetasters by the score.
 Now we've moved on, thank god, and turned the page
 On those dim relics of a bygone age.
 No longer need we poets match our skill
 Against some slavish rhymester's formal drill,
 Nor strive by emulation to surpass
 Verse-manners laid down by the ruling class.
 Get real, catch up: it's free verse now, or rough-
 Hewn rhyme and metre – not that formal stuff!
 If, through fixed habit, rhyme and scan you must
 Then let us know the old-stock firm's gone bust;
 Have rapster-rhythms buck the metric norm
 And fandom stick two fingers up to form.
 Let those posh literati know the day's
 Long gone for glorying in a well-turned phrase,
 Else they'll end up in our "deleted" file
 And add their *oeuvre* to the rubbish-pile'.

Yes, take your point, but why think getting shot
 Of form and structure helps you hit the spot?
 Verse has its target-lock techniques, and owes
 To them what's lost when paraphrased in prose.
 The cross-hairs, rhyme and metre, are the art
 That aims at every sentient head-and-heart,
 Whether the evil-doer's residue
 Of conscience or the reader bang on cue.
 Renounce them, opt to liberate your muse
 From formal chains, and it's a world you'll lose,
 A world of limits, surely, but not one
 Where verse-turned prose deploys a scatter-gun.
 You'll tell me: 'hang on, quit the 'prosy' jibes,
 Don't target us for lack of rhymester-vibes,
 Or just because our lines don't trip along
 On fancy footwork like a Broadway song!'.
 I say: you're right, some poems neither scan
 Nor rhyme yet grant admission to the clan
 Of poets, while some others strive and strain
 For both yet seek that accolade in vain.



Auden



Maxwell

Poetry



Keats, Shelley, Byron, Blake, and Coleridge

But if you're keen to nail the case in verse,
As satire asks, then it'll be the worse
For you, not your choice targets, if you take
The free-up line for greater impact's sake.
For then you might as well renounce the claim
To change the world, or change it in the name
Of poetry, of speech-acts that result
From measured thoughts, not mindless gut-revolt.
It's rhyme and metre, flexibly applied,
That serve as the responsive listener's guide
To tone, intent, and every subtle shade
Of irony that goes to say: point made!
Without them satire's self-condemned to drift
With every change of wind or current-shift,
Its haven marked clear on the harbor-wall
Yet wreathed in mist by every passing squall.
You'll tell me it's performance that's the test
Of all good poetry, of what works best
To agitate, get people on the streets,
Bring regimes down, make up for old defeats!
Let's have no truck (you say) with forms devised
For literary purposes and prized
By those who value fine points of technique
Or style above the goals we rebels seek.
Why let those niceties get in the way
Of words and gestures strong enough to play
Their active part in turning people out
To fight the fascists, put the rats to rout.



Well yes, that much I give you: when it comes
To beating racists, hate-campaigns and drums
Then nothing works as powerfully or fast
As passions voiced impromptu at full blast.
But what if it's your aim to channel hate
In case-specific ways, excoriate
The deed but not the doer, turn the stream
Of public wrath against some bad regime
Yet plead in clear but cautious words a case
For acts with outcomes hard to know or face?
Then there's one handy truth the poet learns:
That it's the nuances you need, those turns
Of phrasing, tone, speech-rhythm, metric pulse,
And so forth, things unsuited to convulse
An action-ready crowd but apt to strike
Attentive types as oddly limpet-like:
The telling points first get a hold, then stick
Until they've done the real conviction-trick.

No contest here, of course: two genres fit
For different jobs with different bits of kit,
Performance poetry to get across
Some urgent gist with zero impact-loss,
While formal verse requires that it be read
With an ear tuned to what's obliquely said.
Still listen closely and you'll mark the signs
Of passion everywhere in those trim lines,
The burning hate that yields a cutting quip,
The metric squeeze that tightens satire's grip,
The politician skewered by a trope,
The killer phrase that ends his dearest hope,
The couplet clinch he'll be remembered by,
And the barbed rhyme that hangs him out to dry.
It's form's great gift: that power to curb and check
Yet energize your free-style what-the-heck.



From left: Mike, Oliver, Rahim, Carolyn, David, Paul, Haldi, Chris, Phil, Berna and Barbara.

Aesthetic Politics

Notes on the Wednesday Meeting Held on 4th of March 2020

PAUL COCKBURN

David Clough gave a talk on the philosopher Charles Taylor and 'aesthetic' politics. Charles Taylor was born in 1931 and studied philosophy at Oxford under Isaiah Berlin. He has written a great deal, but his three most famous books are probably *Sources of the Self* (1989), *A Secular Age* (2007) and his most recent book *The Language Animal* (2016). This last book reveals a possible posthumous respect for Paul Ricoeur whose book *The Course of Recognition* was published in 2007.

Taylor in *Sources of the Self* looks at our moral life and asks what are we aiming at? He thinks it should be the greatest good, and he is influenced by Iris Murdoch's work on this. He also looks at why belief in God has declined in the West. After the strict orthodoxy of the medieval period, there was a 'nova' effect where religious freedom and liberty suddenly took off, and the influence of science and the secular increased. Many new sects were founded, and deism flourished. Taylor

is a Catholic, but he sees some benefit in the many gains that have been made in terms of 'secular' progress.

Taylor is influenced by communitarianism, emphasizing the importance of social institutions in the formation of our identity. He stood for political office a number of times but never succeeded in entering the House of Commons in Canada. He wrote an influential essay in 1992 which ensured that indigenous peoples in North America were granted state recognition and prevented the Canadian government from imposing rigid laws on them.

Taylor supports Gadamer in seeking to understand other cultures by entering into constructive dialogue with them, involving a deeper understanding of where another culture 'comes from', seeking a 'fusion of horizons'.

We discussed what is the nature of aesthetic



From left: David, Paul, Haldi (and Chris)

politics? The Dutch philosopher Frank Ankersmit looks at political and historical ideas in terms of what these ideas represent. The concept of the Renaissance for instance was invented by historians and should be looked at as a metaphor for a historical process. We can view history from many different perspectives. There is a 'political unconscious'. Art opens up new worlds for us, and politicians and the state also try to do this. They will try to win elections by propagating an 'image' of what they will do. They have to influence the 'social imaginary', giving hope, for example by emphasizing the work ethic or the plight of underpaid workers and the unemployed. Rather than dealing with just political 'facts' and policies, they may also appeal to our highest human values.

A concept such as aesthetic politics is hard to define. When asked 'what do you mean more precisely' by this and other concepts, David answered he did not want to define them any further. This was seen by some in the Wednesday Group as a good response, introducing the concept and leaving it open for further creative and imaginative thought. We do not want to strangle new ideas at birth: Arendt's concept of natality is important, each revolution is a new beginning. Charles Taylor's political career illustrates how loosely defined, even 'poetic' philosophy can significantly affect our real lives by tapping into and expressing the 'political unconscious'.

The Wednesday

Editor: Dr. Rahim Hassan

Contact Us:

rahimhassan@hotmail.co.uk

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Barbara Vellacott

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Correspondences & buying The *Wednesday* books:

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Such Moments



While you are absent now, I think of you,
As I shall still, if we must part forever,
How will you pass your days, what will you do,
If our shared paths Time's cruel power should sever?

Two destinies that met in this wide world,
Of beauty and of terror, courage, fright,
Oh may our memories be most of how
We had such moments of supreme delight.

Flames do not last, that is their property,
The most intense ones may least time abide,
And we must turn from them to face the dark
And all the dangers that the dark may hide.

But let us warm ourselves while heat remains
And light has conquered all surrounding gloom,
And treasure all the wealth that can be found
Within the confines of a little room.

Edward Greenwood