REVIEWS

Charles Taylor, *Dilemmas and Connections, Selected Essays*. Cambridge MA and London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011. Pp. 414. ISBN 978-0-674-28436-4, $22.95 pb. ISBN 978-0-674-05532-2, $43.50 hb.

This collection of essays by Charles Taylor, published early in 2011, includes twelve articles published after 1995, plus four previously unpublished essays. In most essays (written after or during the writing of his recent big books, *Sources of the Self* and *A Secular Age*) Taylor is relatively succinct, so sampling some of this collection may be a good way for anyone unfamiliar with his work to taste the fare before Taylor's appearance at the 2014 Polanyi Society annual meeting. It is easy enough to link the discussions in several of the essays (as Taylor sometimes does) to sections in his big books.

What may be of interest to those who know Polanyi is to point out that Taylor, too, appreciates Polanyi. Taylor is not a prolific footnoter, but there are in his other writing some direct references to Polanyi and there are many riffs in which it is easy to see that Taylor's perspective is consistent with some of Polanyi's primary philosophical commitments. In the sixties, when Taylor was a young philosopher, he was a participant in the two conferences sponsored by the Study Group on Foundations of Cultural Unity in 1965 and 1966 and in all but one of the many conferences sponsored by the successor Study Group on the Unity of Knowledge held from 1967 to 1972. Although Marjorie Grene seems to have been the force on the ground in pulling together these important meetings on different aspects of reductionism in contemporary culture, Michael Polanyi chaired the organizing committee and delivered important papers at several of the conferences he attended. Taylor's essay, "How Is Mechanism Conceivable?" appears in *Interpretations of Life and Mind: Essays around the Problem of Reduction*, (New York: Humanities Press, 1971, pp. 38-64). a volume edited by Marjorie Grene and presented to Polanyi on 11 March 1971 for his eightieth birthday

The essays in this collection are helpfully grouped in three categories which place them on the landscape of Taylor's expansive interests. The four essays in the opening section ("Allies and Interlocutors") display Taylor in appreciative dialog with other significant recent thinkers. The essays treating Robert Brandom ("Language Not Mysterious?") and Paul Celan ("Celan and the Recovery of Language") were interesting, but focused on figures with whom I am less familiar. Taylor praises Brandom, a contemporary Wittgensteinian, for his innovative discussion of language but suggests that this would be richer if Brandom better treated both the assertive and disclosive dimensions of language. The essay on Celan, a German-speaking, post-Holocaust poet, is a sensitive comment on Celan's poetry and on the power of symbol in modern poetry, which Taylor links to Heidegger's reflections.

Taylor's concise essay on Gadamer ("Understanding the Other: A Gadamerian View on Conceptual Schemes") shows how Gadamer addresses the dilemmas of modern social science, avoiding ethnocentrism and relativism. With his "bilateral" (25) approach (a "conversational model" [25] unlike the objectivist unilateral approach in natural sciences), he recognizes humans as cultural creatures for whom reckoning with cultural difference is a challenge, but not an impossible one. Taylor's Gadamer is a very creative thinker who shows how pervasive is our drawing on ordinary tacit understandings in the social scientific study of human beings. Understanding the other requires patiently identifying and undoing "those facets of our implicit understanding that distort the reality of the other" (29). All of this gets masterfully worked out in Gadamer's ideas calling for a "fusion of horizons" (30).

"Iris Murdoch and Moral Philosophy" is Taylor's assessment of the achievement of Murdoch, one of his teachers, but it becomes an occasion to develop further themes he affirms with Murdoch. Murdoch was part of the narrow world of analytic moral philosophy (whose evolution Taylor explains), but she moved ethics beyond rights discourse; she "opens up the question of what it is good to be," and "she takes this beyond the question of a good and satisfying life to the consideration of a good which would be beyond life" (4). Taylor is not a Buddhist like his teacher, but wants to extend Murdoch's effort to move ethics discourse "to the almost untracked forests of the unconditional" (5). Rejecting the analytic split between philosophical and religious ethics, Taylor argues that "exemplary figures body forth life goods" (11). Giving the full

range of ethical meanings its due requires focusing not only on doing but also on being and on what we love, which is Taylor's terminology for being moved by some constitutive good. Taylor suggests that "articulating the good is in a way providing reasons." (13). Although he recognizes this affirmation goes against the grain in contemporary humanist culture, he suggests that "'thy will be done' does not reduce merely to 'let human beings flourish'" (17). Otherwise put, Taylor says that "entering the forest means being called to a change of identity" (17). Taylor thus exposes the conflict between modern culture and forest dwelling.

The second four essays, situated under the rubric of "Social Theory," reflect Taylor the social and political philosopher. "Nationalism and Modernity" argues that both modernity and nationalism need to be conceived much more broadly than has often been the case in political philosophy. Taylor shows why "one-line theories of nationalism" (81-82) are inadequate. Much of his discussion is rooted in concrete situations of recent conflict about which Taylor knows a great deal. He builds on Ernest Gellner's discussions of nationalism and modernity, showing that the variety of ways in which the modern state forces homogeneity both encourages and provokes nationalist reactions. Modernity has displaced the traditional "hierarchical mediated-access society" with "horizontal, direct-access societies" (86). Belonging is now more direct and so direct access images have shunted "forms of mediacy to the margins" (86). People who conceive of themselves as participating directly in the public sphere see others as individuals and equals. Just as Taylor shows that recent nationalism is a complex phenomenon, he also argues that we need to recognize "alternative modernities" (94). Modernization is like a wave flowing over and transforming traditional cultures across the world, but insofar as traditional cultures are quite diverse, the modernities imagined and created are diverse.

"Conditions of an Unforced Consensus on Human Rights" is a fascinating effort to approach human rights questions cross-culturally. Taylor proposes efforts aimed to produce norms for behavior while acknowledging that it may not be possible or necessary to agree upon a conceptual basis for such norms. He succinctly lays out the western conceptual basis for the language of rights but then shows how this conceptual basis does not work very well, for example, in a more Confucian context. He looks at a variety of concrete instances of conflicts between the language of human rights and different cultures. What Taylor emphasizes is ways to mediate common political and legal practices based in different underlying justifications. He concludes that we need to distinguish between norms, legal forms and background justifications in the discussion of human rights and cross-cultural possibilities.

"Democratic Exclusion (and Its Remedies?)" shows that it is an element of the "dynamic of democracy" (124) to create exclusions as a byproduct of efforts to create a common identity. Exclusion is morally objectionable and causes difficult problems in modern democratic orders. Taylor argues, however, that understanding the "democratic dilemma" (145) of exclusion is an important step and that exclusion could be better mediated if democratic orders worked more creatively to negotiate and share "identity space" (140). "Religious Mobilizations" is Taylor's discussion of some modern religious forms that have adopted new structures and altered their followers' "social imaginaries and sense of legitimacy as well as. . . their sense of what is crucially important in their lives or society" (147). These are "religious mobilizations" and modernity is an "age of mobilization" (147). In the post-Newtonian disenchanted cosmos, God came to be regarded as present in the design of the cosmos and in the moral and political order in society, which is grounded in free rights-bearing individuals. Primarily what Taylor does in his discussion is show how this new outlook produces new connections between religion and state, moving ultimately through "neo-Durkheimian" (150) permutations to the contemporary scene in which often "the spiritual dimension of existence is quite unhooked from the political." (150).

Part three, "Themes from a Secular Age," contains eight essays. As with the four essays in part two, they are either warm-up reflections for or fallout extensions of Taylor's almost 900-page 2007 book which analyzes the development and nature of the modern and postmodern religious outlook/ orientation to life. "Social imaginary" is a provocative Taylor notion that he defines as "socially shared ways in which social spaces are imagined" (86) and develops in essays in this section, the "Social Theory" section, and in his very interesting short book, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004). Indeed, I find that Taylor's analysis of the "social imaginary" is the key to his work as a thinker who narrates an unfolding account of the history of modern and postmodern consciousness. In the eight essays in

his "Themes from *A Secular Age*" section, Taylor analyzes and interestingly praises and criticizes aspects of the dominant cultural outlook in our secular age. I can do no more in this short review than mention the titles and topics treated in most of the essays in this section.

"A Catholic Modernity?" is an insightful reflection drawing in many elements, and certainly one important one is the case Taylor makes "for unity-across-diversity, as against unity-through-identity" (168). In "Notes on the Sources of Violence: Perennial and Modern" Taylor confronts Girard and offers an interesting meditation on modern categorical violence against whole categories of others. "The Future of the Religious Past," one of the longer essays in the collection, summarizes many ideas developed in *A Secular Age*. The essay lays out major elements of what Taylor acknowledges is his "grand narrative" of Western civilization. He gives "an account of the vectors of religious development up to the present" (214) and then speculates about how this religious past will fare in the future. Taylor ends this essay with some tentative comparisons between the West and some other parts of the world. "Disenchantment-Re-enchantment" covers some of the same ground as "The Future of the Religious Past," but here Taylor's angle of vision focuses on problems of meaning; he ends by opening up the question about possibilities for re-enchantment in the contemporary world.

"What Does Secularism Mean?" briefly unpacks the emergence of ideas about secularism in the West, but then turns to Taylor's carefully reasoned account of how certain principles of secularism should be applied in modern democratic and pluralistic societies. Taylor seems most often to be praised or condemned for his captivating account of the history of ideas (or, better stated, the evolving history of social imaginaries) and particularly his analysis of contemporary culture. However, as this essay—like those in the "Social Theory" section—clearly shows, Taylor is a very insightful political philosopher attuned to the global arena. His constructive political philosophy should not be overlooked.

"*Die Blosse Vernunft* ('Reason Alone')" shows how certain myths of the Enlightenment underlie much moral and political thought in modernity. Taylor analyzes ways in which certain suppositions get combined in many strands of modern thought. This essay fits seamlessly with the following essay, "Perils of Moralism," which is a detailed analysis of what

Taylor dubs "code fixation" (348) or "nomolatry" (351) in modern liberal society in academic moral and political philosophy as well as politics. Taylor shows how "code-centrism" (351) overlooks what Polanyi regarded as the tacit background. He suggests how the modern orientation toward codes is a byproduct of the development of Latin Christianity and shows the ways in which a variety of forms of modern humanism can be understood as a reaction to code-centrism.

The last essay in *Dilemmas and Connections*, "What Was the Axial Revolution?" develops ideas in the third chapter of *A Secular Age*. This essay I read as a remarkably concise but highly abstract précis of Taylor's intellectual project in his recent big books (and some smaller ones) as well as in many of the essays in *Dilemmas and Connections*. What Taylor finds in the discussions of the "axial revolution" is fundamentally a sea change in the history of consciousness concerned with human understanding of the good. Much of what Taylor has been up to now for many years is tracing the trajectory of what he terms the "disembedding" (368) of our human account of ourselves and the good.

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