THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

CHARLES TAYLOR AND THE POSSIBILITY OF A THEORY OF PRACTICE

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ABSTRACT

As dissatisfaction with positivistic social science has grown, the
champions of a variety of "interpretive" theories have prospered. They
claim to practise a form of inquiry more relevant to politics than that
carried on by their positivist competitors; this claim is rooted in the
prior contention that interpretive political theory, unlike positivistic
theory, pays due heed to the self-consciousness of political actors in
the public realm.

These substantial   claims   do   not   exempt interpretive,   or
"hermeneutical," theories from the need to answer the question, "What is
good political theory?"   The purpose of this study is to ask this
question of Charles Taylor's hermeneutical theory, in an attempt to
gauge the scope of the claims that he has made in its behalf.

Scrutiny of Taylor's explicit assertions, as they are made manifest
in the context of a particular metaphor, is undertaken in order to
explore the close relationship between metaphor choice and meta-
theoretical commitment. The study concludes that Taylor's reliance on a
static, visual metaphor for theory is intimately bound up with his
predilection for a theory of practice. It is further argued that this
predilection leads Taylor to neglect the problem of ambiguity in
language, and that of plurality in politics. Finally, it is suggested
that these problems may be more productively studied in the context of
metaphors which make some reference to auditory, as opposed to purely
visual, experience.

To Blair Chapman, James Terekoff, and Jeff Popoff

v

The unity of the self can only be expressed in poetic, religious, and metaphorical symbols.

Reinhold Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man

The substance of history is to be found on the level of experiences, not on the level of ideas.

Eric Voegelin, The New Science of Politics

Non in dialectica complacuit Deo salvum facere populum suum.

Saint Ambrose, De fide

There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,
Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.

William Shakespeare, Hamlet

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Delphic Imperative

Upon Apollo's Delphic shrine, this maxim was graven: "Know thyself." The ancients reverenced it; Plutarch, in his "Letter to Apollonius," hailed it as one of the two inscriptions at Delphi "which are most indispensable to living."[1] The second inscription which won Plutarch's commendation, usually translated as "Nothing in excess," has also won fame. A third, however, which read, "Give a pledge, or give security, and trouble is at hand," has passed into relative obscurity.

Of all three maxims, "Know thyself" has become the most celebrated, figuring prominently in literature ancient and modern.[2] Undimmed by the centuries, it has become more lustrous with the passing of time, an imperative to which succeeding generations have acceded. The forms of its reception have been varied; while it was originally a simple injunction to humility, we are told, it later acquired a more occult significance. To Socrates, the maxim enjoined searching ethical reflection; to the Neo-Platonists, it directed the philosopher to seek his place in the hierarchy of being. The early Church Fathers interpreted the apothegm as an instruction to seek out sin in the heart as a preparation for repentance and participation in the sacramental life, while the medieval mystics saw the self-knowledge to be obtained as the first rung upon an inward ladder which would culminate in the

soul's union with God. More recent readings range from the German idealists' rather extravagant rendering of the maxim as an adjuration to the recognition of a universal self-consciousness, on the one hand, to positivistic paens to the methods of natural science, on the other.[3]

A spotty survey of the maxim's pedigree thus reveals it to be an emblem, in miniature, of the interpretive difficulties endemic to that which is commonly called the "study of ideas," difficulties by which numbers of fortunate scholars get their living. Is it one maxim or many? Where is its meaning to be found, and who is qualified to announce that he has found it?

Perhaps it would be helpful to resolve these difficulties into two distinct but related questions, one of a general, the other of a more particular nature. The more particular question relates to the problem of locating meaning, or, to put it another way, delimiting a proper object of study. Meaning might be supposed to be begotten in the mind of an author, or to be made somehow incarnate in a text, or to be generated by the interpreting community that welcomes such a text. All three suppositions have been seized upon, from time to time, as bases for purportedly normative interpretive methods; consider, for example, the hermeneutics of Schleiermacher and Dilthey, the structuralist semiology of Ferdinand de Saussure, and the audience-oriented criticism of Stanley Fish, as instances of preoccupation with author, text, and interpreting community, respectively.[4]

While an emphasis upon audience is timely and will doubtless bear repetition, it would be foolish prematurely to exclude an interest in

text, or even in the poor, beleaguered author. Especially since the great age of structuralism, it has been rather fashionable to deride concern with an author's intentions as an intolerable chasing after metaphysical butterflies. It has been a long time since Arthur Lovejoy's heyday, and many of today's theorists find his capacity to infer "unit ideas" - with exciting lives and careers of their own - from textual sources, a rather cheap and easy way to paper over the cracks that separate author, text, and audience from one another.[5] To invoke ideas as explanatory variables, whether one houses them in the mind of an author or sets them free to roam as agents in history, as Lovejoy did, is to offend those ascetic temperaments that would prefer to stick closer to the traces of text that we have in hand.

Criticism of a blithe or uncritical inference of "ideas" is not without warrant. To offer an account of a work's significance based solely upon the ideas that enlivened the author's mind leaves the interpreter open to the charge that he entertains pretensions to the status of a carnival clairvoyant, or worse, to that of a necromancer; that is to say, it is to risk "hypothesizing beyond the only evidence we have."[6] Moreover, such a divinatory recreation of the author's creative psyche risks irrelevance, in that it exalts inquiry into the process of aesthetic production at the expense of an understanding of the work's continuing significance in the context of a tradition.[7] Ideas liberated from the mind of the author, substantialized in such a way that authors and audiences can be said to participate in them, may also hinder understanding in that interpreters may be beguiled into

proclaiming continuities where there are none; continuity in the use of verbal formulae may disguise discontinuity in the ideas being expressed thereby.[8]

These criticisms amount to a plea to the interpreter to be attentive to textual discontinuities, to think carefully before pronouncing judgement upon a text. Ideas, writes Conal Condren, "are synoptic descriptions, or covering terms, for the interpretive process [emphasis mine] of bringing together into an intelligible identity parts of a 'text' (to use an uninformative term), for which a hypothetical range of problems forms a completing context."[9] Thus, the bits of vocabulary that are believed to signify ideas fail to do so reliably; old formulae reiterated in new practical contexts amount to new ideas, as do old formulae that are recombined in new ways.[10] In sum, Condren, like Thomas Kuhn and Michel Foucault, asks the reader to "focus upon the hypothetical and fragile nature of ideas and intimate or stress their irrevocably linguistic location and limitations."[11]

This is a reasonable request, and if it is heeded it ought to guide the reader into a careful consideration of the complex interconnections that link author, text, and audience. Nonetheless, a word of caution is in order. Emphasis upon the fragility of ideas must not be permitted to degenerate into a paranoia which would exclude the possibility of inferring ideas altogether, as sometimes seems to happen in the terminal phases of Derrida's anti-metaphysical metaphysics. For, following Condren's circumspect definition, to posit an idea is to offer an interpretive description of things in the direction of an intelligible

unity; to forbid such hypothesizing would be to annihilate that provisional assumption of wholeness without which "there can be no sense of direction in critical understanding."[12]   An interdict of this kind would put an end to the creative process of producing readings (inevitably misreadings), which enables us to enjoy texts; it would betray us into a kind of textual positivism which would have us sit, mute, in the midst of a charnel house piled high with the remains of dead letters and dead men.

Reports of the death of metaphysics have been greatly exaggerated. If one allows the term to comprehend our attempts to give an account of our ways of thinking, with reference to purported structures or presuppositions – which admission seems not unreasonable after Kant – then one allows that we can hardly do without metaphysics.   Exploring the dark spaces within, between, and beyond texts is not merely the reader's prerogative, it is his fate.

The character of readers' metaphysical practices, however, is almost maddeningly variable.   All readers go beyond the textual traces in their material possession, all readers contextualize; not all readers are equally venturesome.   Some display a hubristic drive towards the description of a textual unity, while others prefer to worry over details.   It is this observation which prompts us to move from the particular problem of locating meaning, to the more encompassing problem of the interpreter's manner of knowing.

When Northrop Frye tells us that the assumption of wholeness is essential to the project of critical understanding, he tells only half

the truth. Certainly it is true that a will to wholeness, a constructive, synthesizing disposition, characterizes one fundamentally (theoretically) ineradicable interpretive tendency. This will to wholeness, however, is but one pole of the interpretive antipodes that I would wish to distinguish.

To suggest, as I have just done, that willing might somehow determine a mode of interpretation, indeed, a mode of knowing, is to court controversy. Perhaps the best way to win a moment of indulgence for this claim would be to invite the reader to consider the sense of a question that has been posed by Hannah Arendt, in this regard:

> ... since the will experiences itself as _causing_ things to happen which otherwise would not have happened, could it not be that it is neither the intellect nor our thirst for knowledge (which could be stilled by straightforward information), but precisely the will which lurks behind our quest for causes - as though behind every Why there existed a latent wish not just to learn and to know but to learn the know-how?[13]

One might therefore speak, with Michel Foucault, of a certain "will to knowledge" or "will to truth," which, "reliant upon institutional support and distribution, tends to exercise a sort of pressure, a power of constraint upon other forms of discourse ...."[14] Foucault treats this "will to knowledge" as a phenomenon peculiar to the experience of European philosophy, inextricable from a matrix of practices, possessed of its own particular history: "the history of a range of subjects to be learned, the history of the functions of the knowing subject, the history of material, technical and instrumental investment in knowledge."[15] This description of the will to knowledge clearly

indicates the peril inherent in any attempt to sever an account of this will from its practical contexts, to offer an overly abstract or universalized account of its functioning. Foucault's caution on this score puts one in mind of Blake's warning that "to generalize is to be an Idiot - to particularize is the alone distinction of merit."[16]

Foucault himself, however, has guardedly opened the door to a generalization, a synoptic description, in the very act of affixing the term "will" to the history to which he alludes. For our own purposes, therefore - and coincidentally to delight any readers of a structuralist sensibility - perhaps we may be permitted to further our criticism of Frye's notion of critical understanding by "making an idea," that is, by positing a dichotomy between two kinds of willing, two interpretive tendencies. Frye's will to wholeness is one such tendency, a disposition which seeks to found, to construct, to offer a synthetic interpretation. The other, opposed tendency, just as irreducible, is a disposition towards rarefaction, deconstruction, dissolution of existing interpretations.

To make such a distinction is to tell the story of a will divided against itself, while still remaining, in some wise, recognizably will. Willing is thus comprised of willing and nilling, of an affirmation of the concepts which (contingently) open up an interpretation, and a negation which disrupts both concept and interpretation. Hannah Arendt puts it this way:

> The faculty of Choice, so decisive for the
> liberum arbitrium, here applies not to the
> deliberative selection of means toward an end
> but primarily - and, in Augustine, exclusively
> - to the choice between velle and nolle-,
> between willing and nilling. This nolle has
> nothing to do with the will-not-to-will, and
> it cannot be translated as I-will-not because
> this suggests an absence of will. Nolle is no
> less actively transitive than velle, no less a
> faculty of will; if I will what I do not
> desire, I nill my desires; and in the same way
> I can nill what reason tells me is right. In
> every act of the will, there is an I-will and
> I-nill involved. These are the two wills
> whose "discord" Augustine said "undid [his]
> soul."[17]

In practice, then, willing and nilling coexist in varying

proportion, being manifested in what St. Augustine called "fluctuations

of the soul" between many (potentially) equally desirable ends.[18] In

the retirement of thought, however, we may wish to characterize modes of

interpretation as constructive or deconstructive, insofar as willing or

nilling seems to be the predominant partner in a particular interpretive

mode's "will to knowledge." This distinction corresponds closely to one

that Richard Rorty makes in his Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature,

between "systematic" and "edifying" philosophy; the former attempts to

supply its practitioners with a comprehensive, well-articulated

program of study, while the latter is "designed to make the reader

question his own motives for philosophizing."[19]

While my sympathies rest largely with the latter, edifying mode,

and the interpretive strategies which it might employ, it would be a

mistake to treat the two modes as mutually exclusive. The most rigorous

deconstructionist cannot avoid, in the midst of his deconstruction,

positing certain generalities, if only to deconstruct them again;

in generalizing, of course, he flirts with idiocy, with becoming a solely _private_ person whose judgements no longer mean much of anything to his fellows. This is a difficulty faced by anyone who would describe anything, whether to confirm or to disrupt the conventional sense; in the end, each of us is responsible for the generalities _and_ the particularities which he describes. Considered in this light, the interpretive problem of the inference of ideas from textual sources takes on the aspect of a question relating to a judgement of taste: the theorist (or other would-be arbiter of method) must decide how much latitude can be afforded the interpreter, at what point particularities become unintelligible masses of detail, generalities vacuous or misleading. The governance of processes of interpretive inference thus becomes a question of how to attain proper proportions, which will not offend the canons of a particular will to knowledge.

The two interpretive tendencies which we have delineated, the willing and the nilling of textual wholeness, are amply illustrated in the variety of reactions to _gnothi sauton_. The Apollinian rationalism of the American classicist Edith Hamilton exemplifies beautifully the will to wholeness. For Hamilton, the maxim encapsulates the spirit of a struggle for intellectual liberty, against the oppression of sacerdotal tyranny. The Greeks, she writes, "dared nothing less than to throw the light of reason upon dreadful powers taken completely on trust everywhere else, and by the exercise of the intelligence, to banish them."[20] This had been possible only through the renunciation of religion and the incalculable; Hamilton observes that this renunciation

is nowhere more strongly expressed than in the words of the Delphic imperative, whose sense is "marked by a total absence of the idiom of priestly formulas all the world over."[21] Self-knowledge purges the knower of irrationality so as to free him for his noetic ascent to an Olympian height, until he attains "the eternal perspectives, clear and calm."[22]

Others, of course, have felt otherwise. Friedrich Nietzsche, who seemed to concur in Hamilton's initial reading of gnothi sauton, sought, in his characteristically violent fashion, to violate the maxim's received meaning and to reinterpret the idea of knowledge itself. He regarded the banishment of Hamilton's "dreadful powers" as a diminishment of man's being. "Know thyself," in this light, seems a rebuke to the dead Dionysus, lying in his tomb at the foot of Apollo's golden statue in the temple at Delphi.[23] Dionysus, as the god of inspiration and ecstasy, suffering and terror, was the deity who manifested humanity's experience of the dreadful powers that assert themselves from without and from within.[24] Dionysus was, furthermore, precisely he whose lack of self-knowledge betrayed him into a grisly death; for, according to the myth, the infant Dionysus' childish fascination with an unaccustomed sight - his own reflection in a mirror - disarmed him long enough to allow a group of Titans to attack and dismember him.[25] In short, Dionysus, for all the power that he represented, was a tragic, all-too-human god.

Nietzsche rejoiced in the Dionysus myth, and in the scandal he engendered by pitting that myth against rationalist interpretations of

the Delphic imperative, "Know thyself." He argued that the sort of

knowledge that the maxim seems to elevate undercuts the possibility of

embracing life in its fullness:

> To become what one is one must not have the
> faintest notion what one is. From this point
> of view even the blunders of life have their
> own meaning and value - the occasional side
> roads and wrong roads, the delays,
> "modesties", seriousness wasted on tasks that
> are remote from the task. All this can
> express a great prudence, even the supreme
> prudence; where nosce te ipsum would be the
> recipe for ruin, forgetting oneself,
> misunderstanding oneself, making oneself
> smaller, narrower, mediocre, become reason
> itself.[26]

It would be wrong to suppose that Nietzsche was not seeking

knowledge, after his own fashion, despite his ostensible rejection of

the Delphic imperative. In fact his writings affirm the value of

knowledge as a discipline, a kind of spiritual calisthenics to be

undertaken within the context of a particular way of life:

> The most spiritual human beings, as the
> strongest, find their happiness where others
> would find their destruction: in the
> labyrinth, in severity towards themselves and
> others, in attempting; their joy lies in self-
> constraint: with them asceticism becomes
> nature, need, instinct. They consider the
> hard task a privilege, to play with vices
> which overwhelm others a recreation ....
> Knowledge [is for them] - a form of
> asceticism.[27]

What Nietzsche rejects, then, is the very hope that Hamilton

cherishes, the hope that in the search for knowledge one may expect to

attain to "the eternal perspectives, clear and calm." It is not that

he wishes to negate the Apollinian in its totality, for he recognizes

that the Apollinian love of form is essential to certain kinds of
endeavour, and to the plastic arts in particular, which "overcome the
suffering of the individual by the radiant glorification of the eternity
of the phenomenon ...."[28] In The Birth of Tragedy, however,
Nietzsche presses upon the reader an appreciation of the arts which bear
the import of the suffering which the Apollinian overcomes, most notably
music. (The work's original title was The Birth of Tragedy Out of the
Spirit of Music.)

The Apollinian glorification of eternal phenomena, of radiant
appearance, is thus to be counterbalanced by a Dionysian dynamism, which
carries the phenomena before it, crying:

> "Be as I am! Amid the ceaseless flux of
> phenomena I am the eternally creative
> primordial mother, eternally impelling to
> existence, eternally finding satisfaction in
> this change of phenomena!" [29]

Nietzsche's deepest veneration is reserved for Greek tragedy, which
in his view integrates the characteristics of the plastic arts and of
music, the static and the dynamic, the realm of appearance and the realm
of inwardness. Tragedy satisfies the hunger of eye and ear, offering up
a radiant image of human character, whose brilliant lineaments are
inexorably washed away by the chorus' sonorous tide, the voices of
judgement and of doom.[30]

Nietzsche commends to us a tale of the uneasiness of form; art,
while it is not without its momentary coherences and temporary
solidities, is at its best a mode of expression vulnerable to the
ravishments of time. Knowledge also, as a strange kind of ascetic

recreation, or re-creation, exists amidst the ceaseless flux of phenomena. Rather than seek a commanding vision at the Olympian heights, the reader is urged to find his happiness in the labyrinth.

A labyrinth is a maze in which, once one has entered, no clear, encompassing view is possible. Knowledge in such a place is radically problematic. Short glances ahead, the sense of touch, attention to echoes - these are the clues at one's disposal. It is a terrifyingly finite perspective, one which dictates a certain circumspection in plotting one's progress, for one's projections may at any moment be disrupted by a confrontation with a dead end, or may lose their cogency as one meanders down a confusing passageway.

Knowledge in a labyrinth is ambiguous, for one is never certain what will turn up next; nor can one predict what shape one's memories may assume when they are confronted with new fragments of data. Knowledge in a labyrinth is also plural, its form contingent upon the purposes of those immured within the maze. Some may be seeking a way out, others may try to undermine the walls, while others still may be content to pass the time admiring patterns in the brick-work. All of them will learn certain things in connection with their chosen pursuits, but the question which might obviously seem to be the ultimate one, the question about each activity's intrinsic rationality, cannot be answered without a comprehensive survey of the maze as a whole.

The debate about the nature, or perhaps more properly, the situation of our knowledge, seems an interminable human enterprise. It is not unusual for us humans to think about our problems and

possibilities, our unique condition and the means at our disposal to cope with its exigencies. In short, we think about our practices and, for good or ill, often try to say something intelligible about them. Why we undertake this thinking and speaking about practices is not altogether clear; in his Metaphysics Aristotle suggests that we are actuated both by a need to solve immediate problems, and by a desire to apprehend, which offers its own rewards. "All men," he says simply, "by nature desire to know."[31]

Alas, however, self-absorbed creatures that we are, we seem unable to rest content with our thinking; thinking itself becomes problematic for us. And so, in addition to questions that we commonly ask about our practice of politics, for instance - questions about war and peace, legitimacy and authority, participation and exclusion - we are soon tempted or forced to begin asking a new set of questions, which we dub "meta-theoretical." How do we think about politics? How do we communicate our understandings? Is there a way in which we necessarily do think and speak about life in the political realm? A way in which we definitely ought to think and speak about politics? Or, are some ways of thinking and speaking about politics simply more helpful than others, in some given context?

These are questions which, fundamentally, go to the problem of what a good theory about politics might be like. They are questions about the theory of theory, if it is possible to speak of such a thing; more properly, they are questions about "meta-theory." To theorize is to engage in a human activity; prima facie, it seems reasonable to suppose

that, if we can think about our other day-to-day activities, such as getting a haircut or mowing the lawn, it should be just as possible to think about thinking (or theorizing) itself. In practice, however, thinking has shown itself to be an exceptionally elusive subject matter. To be sure, thinking about thinking has about it an aura of what some have called divinity; Aristotle avers that "it must be of itself that the divine thought thinks (since it is the most excellent of things), and its thinking is a thinking on thinking."[32] This is all very well, but such divinity presumably has an eternity in which to appreciate the boundlessness of its own thought, whereas we do not. Nonetheless, we continue to marvel at the far-ranging, almost boundless experience that is thinking. Insofar as Aristotle's comment about thought's divinity holds true, we should be neither surprised nor alarmed if we discover that the language of meta-theory in politics, like that of apophatic contemplation in theological discourse, tells us more about what theory is not than what it is, indeed, tells us more about our ignorance than our knowledge. At the extremities of such inquiry, we may feel constrained to concur in the judgement of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, that "the more it climbs, the more language falters, and when it has passed up and beyond the ascent, it will turn silent completely, since it will finally be at one with him who is indescribable."[33]

So considered, the difficulties of meta-theory may seem insurmountable. However, in the case of political theory, our present concern, further problems arise to tease the hapless homo

methodologicus, for political theory is a dwelling in absences, a doubly interstitial inquiry. As regards the method of his inquiry, the political theorist hovers between two discursive standards, the diction of the political world, with its attendant priorities, and the language of philosophical discussion, with its often conflicting goods. The political theorist, as homo methodologicus, hovers between these two worlds, expecting (and being expected) to say something of value to each. As might be anticipated, this attempt to address two already heterogeneous audiences, this "compound normative appeal," presents acute problems of meaning and relevance, as the theorist "must persuade and appraise according to scrutinized convention, but by degrees, and janus-like."[34]

Secondly, and distinctly, as regards the matter of his inquiry, the political theorist once again hovers between two discursive modes, the language of technique and the language of morality or ethics.[35] Once again, the political theorist must adapt his analysis to two kinds of conversational style, whose intersection may be (and hopefully is) considerable, but is never guaranteed. It is a confusing place in which to operate; indeed, as Reinhold Niebuhr observes, "The realm of politics is a twilight zone where ethical and technical issues meet."[36]

Given the apparent difficulty of meta-theoretical questions which may arise from political practice, the theorist's suspension between modes of discourse that sometimes seem incompatible, and the likelihood that his words will falter just as he seems to be approaching synoptic adequacy, why should we bother about meta-theory?

First, to gloss Aristotle, it might be suggested that such thinking is a uniquely human excellence, in which happiness may be found. Should this supposition be correct, the meta-theoretical pursuit needs no further justification; should it prove false, and no virtue wait upon the diligence of the inquirer, perhaps at least an appeased vanity awaits.

Secondly, however, it is important to remember what Aristotle has to say regarding the practical importance of political knowledge itself, the form of thinking upon which we propose to think. For Aristotle, the polis is that realm which is sufficiently encompassing to serve as the household of the virtues, the place where men may seek happiness.[37] And of politics itself, Aristotle writes, "Since politics uses the rest of the sciences, and since, again, it legislates as to what we are to do and what we are to abstain from, the end of this science must include those of the others, so that this end must be the good for man."[38]

If, as Aristotle suggests, the meta-theoretical activity is intrinsically excellent, or if, as he also suggests, its subject matter is intrinsically significant, to dismiss the pursuit on epistemological grounds may be an unwarranted subordination of theoretical relevance to method; such a subordination, says Eric Voegelin, can only amount to a perversion of the meaning of science.[39]

The crux of the matter is this: in today's political theory, claims are being made, inferences are being drawn, which have the power to affect the way in which we understand ourselves, and thereby, the way we live. Not invariably, but not infrequently either, theorists are

urging choices upon us, presenting those of us who live in the political realm with visions of what good theory should be, theoretical constructs which seem to follow ineluctably from their meta-theoretical criteria, and finally ethical and practical prescriptions which seem to follow just as ineluctably from their theoretical precepts.

All such theorists and theories make demands upon us; it is incumbent upon students of politics to take stock of these demands at the level of meta-theory, theory, and practice. Such a stock-taking can serve us in two ways. First, to paraphrase Keynes, it can help us to be more than the mere slaves of some defunct political theorist.[40] Secondly, such an effort can help us to preserve a political living space which we find to be civil, and hopefully, congenial. For, as Eric Voegelin so clearly perceived, our "institutions rest on ideas, or symbols, of self-interpretation shared by a people and ... if such interpretations go to pieces, the institutions do so as well."[41]

After some delay, then, we return to the difficult question, "What should a good theory about politics be like?" It is a pressing question, inasmuch as a number of contemporary theorists are clamouring to answer it for us. Before proceeding to examine the answer that is being advanced by Charles Taylor, a Canadian political theorist, it might be wise to return, for a moment, to the question posed at the outset, the problem of the Delphic imperative. What is the situation of our knowing? Is it to be Olympian or labyrinthine?

The answers to these questions are crucial for our understanding of political theory's possibilities. For Nietzsche, the metaphor of the

labyrinth is essential to help us recognize the plurality and ambiguity

of human practical knowledge, whose self-transformation in the effluxion

of time is one of his consuming preoccupations. As a polemicist,

Nietzsche disavows the great Delphic maxim in order to accomplish its

transvaluation. His rejection of clarity, form, and stability is far

from absolute; his debt to Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and especially

the Stoics is considerable, and his affirmation of a new kind of

knowledge is a heartfelt one.[42] It is, however, a new way of knowing

that Nietzsche describes; he re-shapes the textual materials at hand,

giving a new account of the possibilities and limits of knowledge.

It is an account radically at variance with the Olympian interpretation

of the Delphic imperative:

> Theory and practice - Fateful distinction, as
> if there were an actual drive for knowledge
> that, without regard to questions of
> usefulness and harm, went blindly for the
> truth; and then, separate from this, the whole
> world of practical interests ....
>
> Morality is such a curious science because it
> is in the highest degree practical: so that
> the position of pure knowledge, scientific
> integrity, is at once abandoned as soon as the
> claims of morality must be answered. Morality
> says: I need many answers - reasons,
> arguments; scruples can come afterwards, or
> not at all.[43]

In the world of practical interests, of practical knowledge, first

circumscribed by Aristotle's Ethics and Politics, Nietzsche suggests

that the relationship between theory and practice is an intimate and

problematic one. Moreover, not only are theory and practice inseparably

commingled, but, in the world of practical interests prove to be protean

in their response to circumstance; in the labyrinth of politics, morality demands many answers.

Charles Taylor

Nietzsche's view of knowledge, particularly in the realm of the ethical, which, following Niebuhr, is one of the poles that helps to define political space, has been hotly contested. One of those who has expended considerable energy in contesting Nietzsche's conceptions of truth is the contemporary Canadian political philosopher, Charles Taylor. In his most recent work, Sources of the Self, Taylor mounts a sustained critique of latter-day disciples of Nietzsche like Michel Foucault, arguing essentially that their theorizing is impaired by a certain moral timidity. He contends that their pluralizing of truth, their multiplication of knowledge, and their general hesitancy to articulate the framework of the good life, constitute "blinkers which prevent us from acknowledging the force of goods, leave us unmoved by them, or, if we are moved, induce us to misidentify this as some non-moral emotion."[44] This sapping of moral resolve, he concludes, "speaks strongly in favour of the attempt to articulate the good in some kind of philosophical prose."[45]

This is the debate in a nutshell, but like any cursory description, this one fails to capture what is interesting about Taylor's counter-claim. Certainly Taylor is concerned "to articulate the good in some kind of philosophical prose," but his project has been a far more

ambitious one than this modestly-phrased aspiration suggests. In his essay, "Social Theory As Practice," Taylor stakes out his meta-theoretical battleground, arguing for a sort of theorizing which would master theory itself, a theorizing which, by "giving clarity about the practice of theorizing will help us to understand more about the scope and validity of our theories."[46] Commenting further upon this goal in a footnote, Taylor remarks upon the "important points of convergence" between his own views and those set forth by Pierre Bourdieu in his Outline of a Theory of Practice.[47]

Taylor's observation is an interesting, even revealing one; indeed, the pages that follow could well be considered little more than an excursus upon the questions raised by his provocative little footnote. Taylor wishes to theorize about practices, including theoretical practices, and this much we shall grant him as an uncontroversial pastime. Does he, however, wish to develop an "outline of a theory of practice?" If he did, what would this mean?

To be fair, it must be noted that there is no proper answer to these questions which fails to engage Taylor himself, a living philosopher, in answering them. What follows, therefore, is a kind of misreading of Taylor's texts, a consideration of certain predilections, substantive themes, and stylistic habits which recur in his work. This being said, it seems evident that Taylor does engage, textually, in a certain flirtation with the idea that there could be a theory of practice. Although mitigated by other theoretical interests, this

flirtation gives rise to some concerns regarding the import of Taylor's theoretical work.

Taylor's work is of such interest because, in an era singularly obsessed with questions of technique, he has undertaken to re-focus attention upon the ethical dimension of politics. When, as has sometimes been the case, the technical questions relevant to political life are obscured, politics becomes torpid; when the ethical questions are forgotten, it becomes arid. As William Barrett has observed, the pleasant pragmatism of American psychology is not without its consequences for the citizen, inasmuch as its behaviorist variants have sought to make the notion of genuine political choice obsolete.[48]

It was this incipient technocracy of the psyche that first gave impetus to Charles Taylor's theoretical enterprise, furnishing the object of critique for one of his first major works, The Explanation of Behaviour.[49] The book is a searching criticism of mechanistic accounts of human behaviour, which offers a sophisticated description of the levels of explanation which may be constructed to explain, or explain away, that behaviour. Taylor's overarching goal is to restore the legitimacy of teleological discussions about human behaviour; he forcefully contends that it still makes good sense to speak of goal-directed, purposive behaviour, rejuvenating an Aristotelian perspective inadequately dispatched by the "Galilean revolution" in the natural sciences. He argues that "to assume from the superiority of Galilean principles in the sciences of inanimate nature that they must provide the model for the sciences of animate behaviour

is to make a speculative leap, not to enunciate a necessary conclusion."[50]

Having opened the conversation, as it were, with a demonstration of the vulnerability of mechanistic and atomist assumptions imported into the human sciences, and having clearly distanced himself from the implications of those assumptions for a satisfactory account of human agency, Taylor began to explore alternatives within the Western philosophical tradition, alternatives which, to his way of thinking, offer greater scope for an interpretation of human activity as purposive action, within the bounds of political community. The chief fruit of this exploration is his substantial Hegel, which focussed upon the great phenomenologist's attempts to situate human subjectivity within community and within history.[51] The work's distinguishing characteristic is its stress upon the Hegelian notion of freedom as a state of being which must be substantially (and therefore also spiritually) actualized in the course of social and political life. It is this promise of a "situated subjectivity" which makes Hegel's thought an "indispensable point of reference" for contemporary thought, in that "Hegel's writings provide one of the most profound and far-reaching attempts to work out a vision of embodied subjectivity, of thought and freedom emerging from the stream of life, finding expression in the forms of social existence, and discovering themselves in relation to nature and history."[52] While one suspects that the anticipation of such a freedom must have been somewhat dizzying (although probably no more so than the expectancy accompanying most eschatological promises), it has

the virtue, for Taylor, of opening questions about the adequacy of present-day liberal, individualist, and atomist assumptions.

For present purposes, and leaving aside for the moment a number of essays and polemics interesting in their own right, Taylor's next major publication is of the greatest relevance. His two-volume collection entitled the Philosophical Papers, to which we have already alluded, offers a large sampling of essays which constitute perhaps his fullest methodological statement, and which bear witness to his continuing preoccupation with the theory of theory and, indeed, with the possibility of a theory of practice. Taylor's avowed interest in actualizing human agency by the cultivation of freedom in the bounds of an intimate, participatory polity gives rise to questions about his strategy for resolving the conflicts which may arise in the confines of such a polity. The Philosophical Papers, especially as they touch upon the role of political theory, advance Taylor's tentative suggestions in this regard, though not, one should hasten to add, in any programmatic fashion.

Taylor's most recent major work, Sources of the Self, is unquestionably his most exhaustive, as it takes up the interpretive method sketched out in the Philosophical Papers and offers a historical account of human agency, of the "development" of the modern identity. In the course of so doing, Taylor interprets, adjudicates, and offers numbers of substantive judgements regarding the merits and shortcomings of various modes of thought. For the moment, its significance lies in the light it sheds upon Taylor's prior theoretical commitments. However, it

should be noted that, from first to last, Taylor is concerned to explore the nature of human agency, its embodiment in historically-constituted communities, and the role of the theorist in interpreting the exercise of agency, so constituted. These are all issues which cannot fail to interest the student of political theory, and Taylor's work offers an ever-widening account of their significance and interplay.

Before returning to the question of Taylor's espousal of a theory of practice, our central concern, it is perhaps in order to make mention of one further theme which permeates his works, especially latterly. Taylor places himself in the "hermeneutic" tradition; that is, he wishes to acknowledge, first of all, that "human beings are self-interpreting animals," to articulate these self-interpretations, and then to offer a more comprehensive interpretation of their relationships and import.[53] In maintaining this approach, he wishes to follow in the tradition of Martin Heidegger in holding that "interpretation plays no secondary optional role, but is essential to human existence."[54]

Hermeneutic theory is less a cohesive body of thought than a collection of writings marked by certain common emphases. Nonetheless, these emphases are quite pronounced:

> ... hermeneutical theories of understanding argue that all human understanding is never 'without words' and never 'outside of time.' On the contrary, what is distinctive about human understanding is that it is always in terms of some evolving linguistic framework that has been worked out over time in terms of some historically conditioned set of concerns and practices. In short, hermeneutical thinkers argue that language and history are always both conditions and limits of understanding.[55]

In assessing Taylor's contribution to hermeneutical theory, it will be important to consider the way in which he acknowledges, or fails to acknowledge, the force of language and history as conditions and limits of the understandings that he interprets, and of the understanding that he is seeking.

The Possibility of a Theory of Practice

A little pointedly, Conal Condren remarks that Plato, in contrast to Aristotle, "spent his life asserting the overarching authority of philosophy, in whose demeaning shadow all other intellectual activities lay ...."[56] Certainly Edith Hamilton, in singing her paen to the Olympian vista, was playing Echo to Plato's far mightier Narcissus. It was he who stamped upon the Western mind the superiority of the contemplative life, the infallibility of knowledge, the commensurability of human goods, and the possibility of a theory of practice. The legacy of his thought, for politics, is an ambiguous one. "Escape from the frailty of human affairs into the solidity of quiet and order," writes Hannah Arendt, "has in fact so much to recommend it that the greater part of political philosophy since Plato could easily be interpreted as various attempts to escape from politics altogether."[57]

For Plato, the pure operations of reason lead the philosopher to "the contemplation of essence and the brightest region of being," thereby revealing the Form of the Good, that ultimate reality that gives "truth to the objects of knowledge and the power of knowing to the

knower."[58]   The perception of this ultimate Form reveals the nature and order of reality; it is this sublime knowledge which enables the philosopher to make a definitive pronouncement upon the intrinsic worth and relative merits of those things that humans believe to be goods. Of course Plato makes such a pronouncement, exalting reason as the chief human capacity, and its exercise as the crown of human endeavour. As Hannah Arendt observes, with some distaste, in Plato's political philosophy "the whole utopian reorganization of polis life is not only directed by the superior insight of the philosopher, but has no aim other than to make possible the philosopher's way of life."[59]

Now, to the heart of things - the question of the possibility of a theory of practice. To ask this question of Plato, posed in these terms, is undoubtedly to perpetrate an anachronism; however, the commission of such hermeneutic improprieties often proves pleasant, or instructive, or at least a solace in times of trial.[60] Why else would one pore over the classics? At any rate, the question is this: Is it possible for theory, whether it be conceived as a kind of master practice or as a mode of existence entirely sui generis, to map out our being with such perspicacity that, in any situation, it is possible to articulate the whole range of our options and, furthermore, to declare that the better course is also the demonstrably rational one?

Plato seems to answer this question in the affirmative. In Book IV of The Republic, he systematically orders and evaluates the activities of soul and state, and the virtues with which these activities are associated. To the philosopher it is given to know the constituent

virtues of the soul - wisdom, courage, and sobriety - and to know their proper placement in the economy of the psyche and the polis.[61] Moreover, at various points in his writings, Plato suggests that it is possible to take rational action in pursuit of rationally-ordered ends. In the Protagoras, Socrates even intimates that rational action in the realm of practical decision-making is essentially akin to calculation or measurement; rational practice gets beyond the play of appearances by evaluating all possible courses of action in terms of the known truth, thus dissolving ambivalence and practical uncertainty.[62]

If practical action may be undertaken in a manner similar to a process of measurement, the good moral or political theory would seem to be the one which obviates moral perplexity, and even moral deliberation.[63] It is this promise of certitude, so disturbing to Arendt, who considered it an ill-advised retreat from politics, which has exercised such a great sway over Plato's intellectual descendants. From his day to ours, the quest for certainty in matters of morals and public affairs has lost none of its attractiveness, and meta-theory has deemed inadequate any theory which failed to promise such certainty.

Of little interest to us at present, but of considerable importance in the world at large, are the representatives of positivist political science, whose concerns intersect but little with those of Plato, but who are identifiably his disciples in certain important respects. His fascination with numbers and measurement they have inherited, perhaps to a morbid degree. More significantly, they retain a view of political theory as necessarily systematic and comprehensive, ascribing to it the

goals of explanation, prediction, and control. These are Charles Taylor's original adversaries, the behaviorists and their ilk, whose goal in political science is "the objective explanation of political and social life through statistical correlations and causal laws that are empirically discovered."[64]

Of greater interest are those thinkers who have given Plato's vision of theory's dominion over practice an interpretive twist. Taylor names three of these as particularly crucial in the development of the modern notion of freedom, and therefore in his account of the possibilities of human agency: Kant, Hegel, and Marx.[65]

Kant's political doctrine is but a tributary of his moral teaching, a teaching which declares confidently for theory's legislative power; he argues that "practice never surpasses theory, which is completely adequate to resolve moral questions," and that "any and all questions of how to act can be resolved on the plane of pure practical reason ...." [66] For Kant, the determination of moral questions is a theoretical, in fact, a metaphysical exercise:

> Now morality is the only code of laws applying
> to our actions which can be derived completely
> a priori from principles. Accordingly, the
> metaphysics of morals is really pure moral
> philosophy, with no underlying basis of
> anthropology or of other empirical conditions.
> The term 'metaphysics', in its strict sense,
> is commonly reserved for the metaphysics of
> speculative reason. But as pure moral
> philosophy really forms part of this special
> branch of human and philosophical knowledge
> derived from pure reason, we shall retain for
> it the title 'metaphysics'.[67]

In the properly empirical sciences, such as agriculture or economics, Kant concedes that questions about the usefulness and relevance of theory may arise from time to time, although, in such instances, the problem is generally that there is "not enough theory."[68] However, in matters of morality, politics, and international relations, one enters a qualitatively different sphere:

> For in such cases, the canon of reason is
> related to practice in such a way that the
> value of the practice depends entirely upon
> its appropriateness to the theory it is based
> on; all is lost if the empirical (hence
> contingent) conditions governing the execution
> of the law are made into conditions of the law
> itself, so that a practice calculated to
> produce a result which previous experience
> makes probable is given the right to dominate
> a theory which is in fact self-sufficient.[69]

In morality and politics, then, it seems that there can be a theory of practice, that is, a comprehensive account of the rationality of the good, with prescriptive implications, insofar as Kant makes practice entirely dependent upon its acknowledgement of such a theory. The theory itself is "self-sufficient," safe within the realm of metaphysics, to which it has been assigned by Kant's critical taxonomy, his analysis of the conditions in which true knowledge is possible, which Foucault has termed his "analytics of truth."[70] In Kant's secular cult of autonomy, the only permissible heteronomy is the subjection of practice to theory.

Hegel's description of the relationship between theory and practice is, at once, grander and more modest than Kant's. For while Kant was a prophet, calling men to their duty, Hegel was a bard, singing for them

the meanings of their past. Hegel's story of the progressive realization of Mind in history is engaged with the detail of that history to a degree necessarily repugnant to Kant's metaphysics; but the goal of this engagement is to reveal the pattern and meaningfulness immanent in this detail, so that the seeming contingencies of history might be taken up into metaphysics itself.

An account of great complexity and grandeur is the result, but the account gives birth to a paradox: despite Hegel's emphasis upon the activity of Mind in history, and his criticism of Kantian moral theory for its passivity and other-worldliness, in the final analysis his attitude is one of contemplative repose. The forms of moral consciousness are more highly esteemed as they more fully embody the actualization of freedom in its historical situation. A moral subjectivity which is animated by one's inclinations is superior to Kant's abstract concept of right, with its alienating conflict between inclinations and the sense of duty which calls them to task; better still is the ethical life (or _Sittlichkeit_) which brings one's sense of moral vocation into an intimate and harmonious relationship with the social and political institutions which prevail in one's time and place.[71] But beyond this happy homeostatic state, when it is time to consider the further unfolding of the moral consciousness in the processes of social change, Hegel has little to say. In times of "world-historical transition," all of our knowledge about the good life is, as it were, held in abeyance; at such times, hitherto unethical practices may rightfully challenge prevalent ethical codes because "the

justification of ethics itself, through the way it actualizes spirit's freedom, has always been only a limited and conditional justification."[72]   At such times theory is left mute.

Hegelianism is therefore open to complaints about "armchair philosophy." In the here and now, it offers little in the way of a means to evaluate processes of change or alternative courses of action; it provides the individual caught up in history with "no rules of morality which he can oppose to the supremacy of the historical process."[73]   The theorist gives his readers a panoramic view of the past, but leaves the future, and the present, for the most part, to themselves:

> One more word about giving instruction as to
> what the world ought to be. Philosophy in any
> case always comes on the scene too late to
> give it. As the thought of the world, it
> appears only when actuality is already there
> cut and dried after its process of formation
> has been completed .... When philosophy paints
> its grey in grey, then has a shape of life
> grown old. By philosophy's grey in grey it
> cannot be rejuvenated but only understood.
> The owl of Minerva spreads its wings only with
> the falling of the dusk. [74]

The philosopher, then, is depicted as a particularly inspired historian of sorts, whose insights nonetheless lack prescriptive force. With Hegel, the prospect of a theory of practice thus recedes considerably. Not entirely, however, for Hegel's claim that his system offers a comprehensive account of Mind's progress in history, of the very actualization and configuration of reality itself, is a powerful temptation and a standing challenge to those who would like to derive an application or two.

Amongst those so tempted, Marx is the foremost.   He aspires to the
office of both prophet and bard, with the result that his writings bear
an apocalyptic stamp.   All of Kant's moral vigour (though not his
concern with metaphysical precision), and all of Hegel's systematizing
grandeur are to be found in Marx, for whom theory and practice commune
in an unprecedented intimacy.   Historically, materially, for the first
time in the history of philosophy, theory and practice are to be one, in
indissoluble union:

> Just as philosophy finds its <u>material</u> weapons
> in the proletariat, so the proletariat finds
> its <u>intellectual</u> weapons in philosophy. And
> once the lightning of thought has penetrated
> deeply into the virgin soil of the people, the
> <u>Germans</u> will emancipate themselves and become
> men .... <u>Philosophy</u> is the <u>head</u> of this
> emancipation and the <u>proletariat</u> is its <u>heart</u>.
> Philosophy can only   be realized   by   the
> abolition of   the   proletariat,   and   the
> proletariat can only be abolished by the
> realization of philosophy.[75]

This scheme does not so much stand Hegel's dialectic right side up,
as Marx was wont to claim, as lead it rudely from the study into the
street, where it is pressed into an unaccustomed partisanship, that is
to say, another kind of partisanship than that to which it had been
accustomed.[76] To put it another way, the immanentization of moral and
political meaning from the pure realm of Kantian metaphysics into
Hegelian metaphysical history is carried a step further with Marx;
metaphysics is dissolved finally and utterly into the material processes
of social, economic, and political life.

This dissolution, however, does not impair theory's status; in
fact, it enhances it.   Theory which has shaken off its idealist

illusions and established contact with its material ground is helped to
a proper understanding of social life; materialist theory is thus
coextensive with "real science."[77]   The task of theory is to serve as
"the empirically-controlled retroduction of an adequate account of the
structures producing the manifest phenomena of socio-economic life,
often in opposition to their spontaneous mode of appearance," which
function involves "the critical transformation of pre-existing theories
and conceptions ...."[78]

A theory of practice seems possible once again, a theory of
practice characterized by scientific rigour.   The judgement of the
theorist is to be normative for the class whose interests his theory
embodies, and ultimately for society as a whole.   While theorists in the
Communist movement "have no interests separate and apart from the
proletariat as a whole":

> ... theoretically, they have over the great
> mass of the proletariat the advantage of
> clearly understanding the line of march, the
> conditions, and the ultimate general results
> of the proletarian movement ....
>
> The immediate aim of the Communists is the
> same as that of all the other proletarian
> parties: formation of the proletariat into a
> class, overthrow of the bourgeois supremacy,
> conquest of political power by the
> proletariat.
>
> The theoretical conclusions of the Communists
> are in no way based on ideas or principles
> that have been invented, or discovered, by
> this or that would-be universal reformer.
>
> They merely express, in general terms, actual
> relations springing from an existing class
> struggle, from a historical movement going on
> under our very eyes .... [79]

The theorist, then, is no longer working to present to the autonomous self the grounds and articulation of its knowledge, nor to sketch the progress of universal Selfhood in history. Rather, he takes as his object of study material social processes, and the innumerable lives caught up in them. As guardian of the "lightning of thought," his role is more Promethean by far than that assigned by Plato to his philosopher king; Marx's theorist knows the disciples that are to be given to him in advance of their historical emergence, he foresees their destiny, and by the work of his thought he educates and forms them out of the chaos of a dying system of productive relations, into a class capable of serving as the agent of historical transformation. Theory, perfectly immanent in the material world, nonetheless also heroically transcends history's wayward contingencies in order to offer its practitioners a spectacular view of the world to come.

From Kant to Hegel to Marx, theory first rules practice, then understands it in a sweeping act of retrospection, then becomes one with it in an ecstatic, almost omniscient union. This final development has, over the course of time, proven forbidding in the fulness of its promise, and even those theorists who consider themselves the heirs of Marx have backed away from it somewhat. Some of the original optimism remains, however, in works like Pierre Bourdieu's Outline of a Theory of Practice. Although the prescriptive element is more muted than it is in Marx, to whom Bourdieu pays tribute as the originator of the idea of an "adequate theory of practice," it remains, and the proposal for a

comprehensive propaedeutical analysis of practice is, if anything, more sophisticated.[80]

Several themes in Bourdieu's study have a prominent place in Taylor's work as well, and therefore should be mentioned, however briefly. First, Bourdieu is concerned to propound a theoretical method which will help to articulate the practices of a people in a comprehensive fashion. In the case of the Kabyles, the Berber tribesmen who are the object of his study, Bourdieu contends that a close examination of the "implicit axiomatics" of their customary law, coupled with a study of their explicit laws, should enable one "to reproduce all the provisions of all the customary laws which have been collected and even to produce the complete universe of all the acts of jurisprudence conforming to the 'sense of justice' in its Kabyle form."[81]

Secondly, Bourdieu argues for the superiority of the comprehensive explanations offered by a theory of practice over the native self-understandings of the group being studied. He argues that such self-understandings are often preoccupied unduly by the most visibly exceptional aspects of practice; while such a preoccupation may facilitate the transmission of a practice from generation to generation by making it more vivid for novices, the "implicit principle" which animates the process is thereby obscured. Thus agents' self-understandings, more often than not, amount to a kind of false consciousness:

> The explanation agents may provide of their
> own practice, thanks to a quasi theoretical
> reflection on their practice, conceals, even
> from their own eyes, the true nature of their
> practical mastery, i.e. that it is learned
> ignorance (docta ignorantia), a mode of
> practical knowledge not comprising knowledge
> of its own principles. It follows that this
> learned ignorance can only give rise to the
> misleading discourse of a speaker himself
> misled, ignorant both of the objective truth
> about his practical mastery (which is that it
> is ignorant of its own truth) and of the true
> principle of the knowledge his practical
> mastery contains.[82]

Thirdly, in contradistinction to Ludwig Wittgenstein, at least the

Wittgenstein of the Tractatus, Bourdieu maintains that theory is not

simply to clarify the world, but must also offer the means to change it.

Accordingly, Bourdieu says that his theoretical procedures are "intended

to help surmount difficulties, by providing not only procedures for

research but also procedures for validation, means for deciding between

competing accounts of the same practices."[83] As he concludes his study,

Bourdieu not only adjudicates between competing accounts of Kabyle

practice, but also pronounces upon the culture's rationality and the

modes of exploitation which mark its power structure, comparing Kabyle

society explicitly with capitalist political economy and drawing

conclusions on this basis.[84]

The major themes developed in Bourdieu's proposed theory of

practice - a desire for articulation of the tacit, the will to clear

away purportedly deceptive self-understandings, and the drive to judge

the adequacy of competing theories and even competing rationalities -

are each taken up by Charles Taylor in his hermeneutics, to what effect, we shall presently consider.

A Note on Textuality and Method

"The Word," writes William S. Burroughs, "is divided into units which be all in one piece and should be so taken, but the pieces can be had in any order being tied up back and forth in and out fore and aft...." [85] The solidity and reliability of texts, and received groups of texts, although often taken for granted, ought not to be. Not only are individual texts heterogeneous constructs, whose import is potentially unstable relative to the changing conventions of readerships, but canons of work traditionally received as unities, such as the Bible or the collected works of Shakespeare, are also susceptible of deconstructive reinterpretation.

This is not to suggest that it is impossible for a reader to engage (or indulge) in a dialogue with a text. Quite the contrary; however, it is important for the reader to be aware of the limits of his situation, limits which are the occasion of his questioning of the text and which enable him to discern unities within it, as well as to postulate connections with other texts. Hans-Georg Gadamer puts it this way:

> There is no such thing, in fact, as a point
> outside history from which the identity of a
> problem can be conceived within the
> vicissitudes of the various attempts to solve
> it. It is true that all understanding of the
> texts of philosophy requires the recognition

of the knowledge they contain .... But this
does not mean that we in any way step outside
the historical conditions in which we find
ourselves and in which we understand.[86]

To gloss Gadamer further, communion with a text is possible, and is
not without transformative potential and ontological implications.[87]
Communion, however, by its very definition, involves participation, and
participation entails bringing one's tastes, predilections, and
interests into the conversation with a text. Gadamer, who wishes us to
be reconciled to the texts with which we converse, makes his argument in
a gentle, conciliatory way, but this approach is not the only one; one
might just as justifiably point to more unsettling aspects of the
reader's relationship with the text. In this regard, one might more
appropriately speak of misreadings of the text, or, "political
interventions in the political rewriting of the text and its
destination."[88]

To consider the text and one's interpretation thereof as political
artefact and political act, respectively, accomplishes two things.
First, such an understanding is prophylactic against what Quentin
Skinner has termed the "mythology of doctrine," that is, "the danger of
converting some scattered or quite incidental remarks by a classic
theorist into his 'doctrine'," or, conversely, allowing the question
which the theorist is investigating to be "hypostatized into an
entity."[89] Anyone familiar with the workings of politics is keenly
aware that neither the actors nor the questions which preoccupy them
last very long, the latter seldom long enough to be hypostatized into
anything.

Secondly, a political orientation towards texts helps the interpreter to guard against what Skinner called the "mythology of coherence," the "assumption that they [the writers of theoretical texts] must have intended whatever writings they produced to constitute the most systematic contributions to their subject which they were capable of executing."[90] As A.M.C. Waterman has cautioned, it is better to attempt to identify a "coherent subset" of an author's work than it is to try to "tidy up the creative mess" he has created, by forcing all of his writings into the Procrustean bed of a "general position."[91] It may be possible to attribute such a position to Burke or Bentham, theorists long since departed, without drawing too much adverse attention to oneself. However, when the theorist to be discussed is still capable of speaking for himself, such treatment adds insult to injury.

In politics, speeches and writings serve an important but ephemeral purpose: they generate discussion and advocate for the adoption of particular judgements with respect to certain issues of current concern. Notwithstanding the sometime grandeur of political theory's aspirations, it performs similar functions and ought to be judged in a similar way.

To put this in a simpler way, it will be desirable to treat works of political theory as works of rhetoric, that discipline which is, like politics itself, ambiguous, suspended between form and content, art and science, theory and practice.[92] In the pages that follow, an attempt will be made to appreciate the import of Charles Taylor's reliance upon a particular rhetorical device, a visual metaphor, for his theory of

political language, action, and community. Specifically, it will be our concern to consider the way in which Taylor's aesthetic strategies serve, from time to time, to distract attention from problems related to the ambiguity of language, the plurality of actors in the political realm, and the diversity within and amongst political communities.

As an inquiry into Taylor's rhetorical practice, this essay holds questions about truth, in the strictest sense, in abeyance; "in a rhetorical universe the notion of 'truth' does not obtain, since it would imply external foundations, to be sought in the nature of things, or in discourses themselves, or in some transcendent entity."[93] Of course the rhetorician seeks after none of these things, but rather after the agreement of his interlocutors in the immediate instance.

For this reason, the reader should not be misled into thinking that discussion of "the possibility of a theory of practice" will entail taking up any kind of transcendental argument. Such an argument would necessitate the most involved consideration and critique of Kant's estimation of the nature and limits of practical reason; the pleasure to be gained by the apodeictic resolution of the question would surely be vitiated, at length, by exhaustion. Moreover, transcendental arguments themselves (of which Taylor is clearly enamoured) constitute a powerful, if questionable, rhetorical strategy, at least as interesting for their form as for their content.

Taylor describes these arguments as chains of a priori, self-evident "indispensability claims" which pertain to human experience, and he cites Kant's transcendental deduction as an example, in the following

summarized form: "experience must be an object, that is, be of something; for this it must be coherent; and to be coherent it must be shaped by the understanding through the categories."[94]

This argument does, as Taylor says, "articulate indispensability claims concerning experience as such."[95] Because his goal in "The Validity of Transcendental Arguments" is simply to illustrate the type of argument in question, Taylor does not explain why it might be considered to have an "unchallengeable anchoring," nor even why it ought to be considered an argument, except to say that it is an articulation of certain insights into experience.[96] The connection between the links in the chain is less than perfectly apparent.

However, Taylor's "chain" metaphor is particularly apt in that it isolates the rhetorical strategy peculiar to the transcendental argument, that is, the diffusion of what would otherwise be a discomfiting level of rhetorical force along a chain of assertions. Each assertion being "self-evident," there is always recourse for the theorist advancing the argument; he simply appeals to an assertion further down the chain, in either direction. It is, in short, a strategy of deferral. John Sallis argues that, in transcendental arguments of the Kantian kind, the treatment of experiential issues is in fact always a reflexive one:

> The text merely posits the order of grounding,
> thereby inviting from elsewhere, from outside
> the text, the showing of the order of
> grounding as proper to the terms thus
> connected. In what region could this deferred
> showing occur? Only in that region to which
> belong those terms to which the order of
> grounding is to be shown to be proper. But

> those terms are representational activities,
> and so the region of the showing can only be
> that of representational activity as such,
> that is, subjectivity, and the showing thus a
> reflexive showing, a self-showing, or showing
> of oneself to oneself.[97]

If, as John Sallis indicates, transcendental argument is simply a rhetorically powerful, reflexive, self-showing, then there is no need to be either awed or compelled by it. It is worth consideration as one avenue into the imaginative life of theory, in which, as Paul Veyne writes, there are no a priori truths other than historical and constructed ones![98] By thinking of Taylor's theory as an aesthetic construct, by focussing upon its use of metaphor, we shall try to take the freedom that is necessary to hear the dissonance that arises between its stated aspirations and the resonances of some of its lesser themes. To do so is to treat the work in a most unsystematic way, at its imaginative, symbolic level.

This is perhaps not an unworthy way to proceed, if one agrees with Nelson Goodman that theory should be conceived "as developing concepts and patterns, as establishing habits, and as revising or replacing the concepts and altering or breaking the habits in the face of new problems, needs or insights."[99] Theory of this kind will, of necessity, be unsystematic, a work of intervention or disruption, a calculated misreading. It will not offer, perhaps, new solutions or syntheses but, in a world where everything is dangerous, it will each day seek to determine "which is the main danger."[100]

CHAPTER II

METAPHOR AND POLITICS

The Power of Metaphor

Theology, Jacques Derrida wryly observes, is "the discourse of someone who is satisfied with metaphors."[1] Philosophy, and the disciplines which are its progeny, have long aspired to a state of certitude less vulnerable than that promised by theology, and consequently their attitude toward the undisciplined plurality of metaphors has been ambivalent. For when theology claims to see at all, it is but through a glass, darkly; its use of symbol is oblique and fragmentary. Philosophy, on the other hand, longs for something more, a clearer vision:

> If there were only one possible metaphor, the
> dream at the heart of philosophy, if one could
> reduce their [i.e. metaphors'] play to the
> circle of a family or group of metaphors, that
> is, to one "central," "fundamental,"
> "principial" metaphor, there would be no more
> true metaphor, but only, through the one true
> metaphor, the assured legibility of the
> proper.[2]

All of the rhetorical and poetic arts were suspect for Plato, who describes rhetoric as flattery, "the counterpart in the soul of what cookery is to the body," and poetry as an imitative craft practised in ignorance of its subject matter, "concerned with the third remove from truth."[3]

In political theory, Plato's suspicion of the rhetorical arts echoes and re-echoes. Metaphor, as the trope most closely allied to the myths against which philosophy had to struggle for supremacy, the trope which in fact founds myth, has been the object of particular attention and concern.[4] Aristotle, though he attempted to rehabilitate the status of rhetoric, and with it, metaphor, also sought to domesticate metaphor; his treatment of the arts of persuasion "constitutes the most brilliant of ... attempts to institutionalize rhetoric from the point of view of philosophy."[5] While Aristotle praises the mastery of metaphor as a "sign of genius," he does so because this mastery involves "an intuitive perception of the similarity in dissimilars."[6] The significance of "metaphors, strange words, and the rest" is strictly local and ornamental; their use is justifiable insofar as it gives poetic and rhetorical diction a "non-prosaic character."[7] Moreover, the use of metaphor is subject to judgements of propriety and impropriety in particular circumstances, and presumably also is never beyond explanation in terms of the similarities which the unusual diction attempts to evoke.[8] Thus, metaphor is deprived of any conceptual, let alone ontological, priority; it is always a device whose application falls within the compass of philosophic governance.

If Aristotle tried to domesticate metaphor for its artistic and political uses, subsequent generations would attempt to eradicate it altogether. In the seventeenth century, the latter tendency was championed by the Royal Society of London, whose official style "sought to ban metaphor, and aspired to the condition of logic, searching for

mathematical precision."[9]   The   Royal   Society's   "underdetermined

discourse" aspired to a simplicity, clarity, and exactitude which

excluded the use of figurative language:

> Underdetermined discourse seeks to suppress
> any sense of the material signifiers. It
> represses the materiality of language in order
> to make the sequence of signified concepts
> appear like pure and disembodied ideas. It
> further seeks to make the signified concepts
> stand for, or represent, things. In this way
> the textual world created by underdetermined
> discourse appears to become the exact naive
> realist equivalent of the empirical world
> about which it purports to speak. In short,
> underdetermined discourse claims to be the
> language of Truth.[10]

One of the foremost proponents of this underdetermined style was

Thomas Hobbes, who founded modern analytic philosophy and modern

political science upon an appeal to the clarity of geometric method and

Galileo's physics.[11]   Politics conceived as science, in the Hobbesian

fashion, could have no use for metaphor, a sort of false naming of

things which is no more than an abuse of language.   Hobbes condemns

metaphor as a perversion in which words are used "in other sense than

that they are ordained for," in short, as a vehicle of deception.[12]

The three responses to the problem posed by the use of figurative

language, and of metaphor in particular, exemplified by Plato,

Aristotle, and Hobbes - distrust, limitation, and deportation - neither

exhaust the subject nor solve the problem.   Even in the realm of

science, metaphor has not been so easily banished. A case in point is

the prevalence of "tree metaphors" in scientific discourse.

> Trees are indispensable to science. From
> physics to physiology, they serve as
> metaphors, expressing in a word details that
> would otherwise occupy a paragraph. They range
> from the momentous to the prosaic, from
> Charles Darwin's great Tree of Life to a
> layout for distributing cable television. In
> science, the intellectual landscape is
> everywhere wooded and in places a veritable
> thicket.[13]

Stephen Young, in his article, "Root and Branch in the Groves of Academe," surveys the use of tree metaphors in physics, mechanical and electrical engineering, statistics, geometry, computer science, linguistics, and biology. In each of these instances, the metaphor serves as an essential descriptive tool, conveying information with an elegance, economy, and sophistication that would otherwise be impossible. In certain of these instances, notably in the case of biology, the metaphor seems to play an even more significant role, helping to constitute the knowledge which it seeks to convey.

Thomas Kuhn identifies three phases through which scientific thinking must pass as it travels toward the employment of a new paradigm which will guide its practice in any one of its various sub-disciplines. First, scientists must become attuned to the appearance of anomalies, phenomena which cannot be accounted for in terms of the regnant paradigm, or matrix of understanding; the attainment of such percipience is, moreover, as dependent upon the development of alternative ideas as the improvement of scientific instruments. Secondly, the appearance of a perceived anomaly must be subordinated to the status of a lawlike event; this is essentially a process of redescription which involves the revision of experimental expectations, and sometimes of fundamental

theories as well. Finally, the implications of a redescription must be explored, in terms of their significance for previously settled explanations of phenomena.

The tree metaphor proved crucial to the development of Charles Darwin's theory of evolution at each of these three stages of paradigm shift - anticipation, redescription, and consolidation. At each stage, the metaphor served as a new medium of understanding, which enabled Darwin to consider the biological world in a new way, to describe his insight in a forceful and elegant way, and to lay the foundation for further research.

The tree, "as a symbol of both natural diversity and evolutionary change," was not always the favoured metaphor by which biologists conceived the natural world.[15] For centuries linear metaphors had conditioned scientists' understanding of nature. Chief amongst these metaphors was the "Great Chain of Being," which posited a continuous, graded, hierarchy of natural kinds, a view of natural order prevalent from ancient times until the eighteenth century, at least.[16]

For centuries, the chain metaphor afforded its proponents a description of the cosmos that was intellectually and aesthetically satisfying, and which was in consonance with traditional philosophy and theology.[17] In time, however, the doctrine of fixed natural kinds came to seem inadequate, as biologists began to perceive anomalies, such as variation within species and gradual adaptation to the environment.[18] The old categories no longer seemed to fit.

The perception of anomalies which were problematic for the chain metaphor in biology did not occur in a vacuum; the tree metaphor provided a different way of conceiving of the natural world, as a developing rather than a static world, "where forms fanned out in all directions and could hold equal rank."[19] Darwin's predecessors, whose theories now seem antiquated and incomplete, turned to the tree metaphor in an interrogative spirit, without certainty at first, but in any case depending on the metaphor to help them ask new questions. In the writings of Charles Bonnet, the eighteenth-century Swiss biologist, the conflict of metaphors is evident. "Does the scale of nature become branched as it arises?" he asked in 1764. "Are the insects and the shell-fish two parallel and lateral branches of this great trunk?"[20]

In the further studies of Lamarck, von Baer, Edwards, and Barry, the tree metaphor served as a medium for anticipating a new biology.[21] It remained for Darwin to fully embrace the metaphor, to adopt it as the image of nature. For twenty years, he "unpacked" the metaphor, exploring its ramifications, until in his Origin of Species, he confidently presented all organic life as a "great tree," whose

> ... green and budding twigs may represent
> existing species; and those produced during
> each former year may represent the long
> succession of extinct species .... As buds
> give rise by growth to fresh buds, and these,
> if vigorous, branch out and overtop on all
> sides many a feebler branch, so by generation
> I believe it has been with the great Tree of
> Life, which fills with its dead and broken
> branches the crust of the earth, and covers
> the surface with its ever branching and
> beautiful ramifications.[22]

Here is a metaphor which not only heralds a new programme of research, which continues up to the present, but which also suggests possibilities in the way of aesthetics, philosophy, and theology - a comprehensive alternative to the "Great Chain of Being." Perhaps it is not an exaggeration to suggest that Darwin's apt and extended treatment of the tree metaphor ushered in a new world of sorts.[23]

Metaphor's contribution to biology seems to exceed the merely ornamental; whether it has been deceptive must be left to others who are more competent to judge. At any rate, it does not seem possible to rescue science from metaphor, as Hobbes would have wished, as metaphor has been crucial, in at least some significant instances, in providing a matrix within which the dialectic of scientific theorizing could proceed. Nowhere is the power of metaphor more poignantly apparent than it is in the somewhat puzzled question of Charles Bonnet, caught between the chain and the tree: "Does the scale of nature become branched as it arises?"

Politics is as dependent upon metaphor as science is. For all that Plato, Aristotle, and Hobbes sought to dismiss metaphor, or at least to contain it, it has proven to be a trope not so easily banished, a problem to which their own writings bear ample testimony. Plato, in addition to employing illustrative metaphors in his Republic, perhaps most strikingly in his assertion that unenlightened existence is a mere dwelling in a cave, founds the entire discourse upon a metaphor: the state is a soul, he maintains, which must strive for the virtues of wisdom, courage, sobriety, and justice.[24] (This is a daunting thought.)

Aristotle tells us that the state is a "creation of nature," a living body with parts functioning like feet or hands; he thereby founds his politics upon an organic metaphor.[25] (This, by comparison with Plato's lofty vision, is a somewhat depressing thought.) Thomas Hobbes, for his part, straightforwardly claims that the state is an "Artificiall Man," a machine whose motions are to be regulated by the technical artifices of political science.[26] (This last, a fitting inauguration of the modern era, is an altogether frightening thought.)

Contemporary political theory, in its guises both traditional and novel, continues to depend upon metaphor's scandalous predications. Neo-classical political theory, as espoused by Leo Strauss, presumes to don Plato's mantle and with it, his distaste for metaphor. Plato, according to Strauss, "attacked myth at its root" in order to replace it with a radically rational theory of politics.[27] Both politics and art, Strauss argues, ought to be subordinate to moral philosophy, which alone frees man from the mystifying influence of poetry and myth.[28] Political theory along Platonic lines is "not a historical discipline"; rather, it goes straight to the universal, eternal problems posed by the nature of political things, the nature of man and of the state.[29] The classical political philosophy which Strauss encourages us to emulate is characterized by "freshness and directness," by "noble simplicity and quiet grandeur"; above all else, it is "natural," which is to say that it is guided by "nature rather than convention, or by inherited opinion, or by tradition, to say nothing of mere whims."[30]

Strauss' rhetoric of discursive purity is, however, undercut by his reliance on Plato's texts themselves. At no point does Strauss disown any of Plato's many metaphors; at times, in fact, he takes the liberty of inventing new ones, sometimes to strangely comic effect. Meditating upon the Laws, Strauss rather surprisingly makes the dialogue's extended conversation about wine-drinking into a metaphor for political philosophy itself.[31] Other commentators invest this passage, indeed this dialogue, with no outstanding significance in the context of Plato's total corpus. Copleston, for example, presents the Laws as the work of an older, somewhat chastened Plato, who is advancing a range of practical prescriptions in the hope of realizing a modest approximation of the good state.[32] So considered, the passage on wine-drinking would appear to be little more than a discussion of practical means whereby a simple pleasure might be governed by the virtue of moderation.

Strauss, however, extravagantly claims that "the speech about wine appears to be the introduction to political philosophy."[33] His further comments in this regard depend upon an unusual figurative contortion, a metaphor that issues from a metonymy, and a strained metonymy, at that. "The talk about wine-drinking," Strauss tells us, "is a kind of vicarious enjoyment of wine ... the effect of the talk about wine is therefore similar to the effect of actual wine-drinking; it loosens their [the philosopher's interlocutors'] tongues; it makes them young; it makes them bold, daring, willing to innovate."[34]

Strauss' almost Pavlovian metonymy, which substitutes talk about tippling for the drinking itself, stimulates the philosopher's

interlocutors to a greater freedom of thought, permitting them to aspire to philosophy's divine madness. The philosopher himself, however, the focus of the dialogue and the master of the discourse, is actually dulled by his vicarious indulgence, which fortunately "dims his perception" sufficiently to allow him to speak about politics![35] In the end, the entire situation is translated into a Straussian metaphor for political philosophy, which on this account appears to be a less-than-golden mean subsisting in a sort of limbo above the banalities of conventional political discourse, but beneath the sublimity of philosophy proper.

Thus, neo-classical political theory, far from abjuring metaphor, as it sometimes purports to do, makes its home in a rather strange figurative dwelling.[36] Other contemporary schools have shown themselves equally dependent upon metaphor, although, lacking such a great and treacherous model as Plato, fail to manifest such interesting contradictions. Cybernetic theory, pioneered by the mathematician Norbert Wiener, has been applied to comparative government by Karl Deutsch, and to international affairs by Stephen Bryen; a neo-Hobbesian positivism, cybernetics theory conceives of politics as an artificial intelligence system, and seeks to describe political activity in terms of "communication and control" processes analogous to those employed by a computer's feedback mechanism or "learning net."[37] Public choice theory, with its invocation of deterministic, binary-based decision-making; political entrepreneurship; and the optimizing of collective "goods" (in the classical economic, rather than philosophic sense), suggests to us that politics is a marketplace.[38]

Political theory, as these examples indicate, seems always to have metaphor at its core. Metaphor has not been evaded, even where theorists have expended considerable energy and intellectual acuity in the attempt; it seems that they will always be conceptualizing politics in terms of organism, mechanism, the family, quantum theory, or some such predicate. As Hans Blumenberg suggests, there will always be a need for at least one metaphor:

> To bring myth to an end was once supposed to have been the work of _logos_. This consciousness of itself on the part of philosophy – or better, of the historians of philosophy – is contradicted by the fact that work aimed at putting an end to myth is again and again accomplished in the form of a metaphor of myth.[39]

"Metaphor," as Jacques Derrida puts it, "is less in the philosophical text (and in the rhetorical text coordinated with it) than the philosophical text is within metaphor."[40] Metaphor creates the space within which metaphysical narratives, narratives of all kinds, unfold. Troublesome as it may be, "metaphor," says Derrida, in an uncharacteristically forthright venture into philosophical anthropology, "is what is proper to man."[41]

How shall we account for metaphor's ubiquity, scope, and power? Aesthetically pleasing as metaphor may often be, surely it must serve as something more than a simple discursive ornament. Indeed, this is the crux of Marx Black's argument in his classic study, Models and Metaphors.[42] In contradistinction to traditional theories of metaphor, he holds that metaphor is neither simply a form of catachresis (the substitutionary use of a word in some new sense in order to "plug the

gaps" in the existing literal vocabulary), nor simply an elliptical simile, which could be replaced by a literal comparison using "like" or "as."[43] Rather, metaphor is an act of creative predication which involves the interaction of two subjects, and which issues in a resultant change in meaning. Elucidating his "interaction" view of metaphor, Black makes the following seven claims:

> (1) A metaphorical statement has two distinct subjects - a "principal" subject and a "subsidiary" one.
> (2) These subjects are often best regarded as "systems of things," rather than "things."
> (3) The metaphor works by applying to the principal subject a system of "associated implications" characteristic of the subsidiary subject.
> (4) These implications usually consist of "commonplaces" about the subsidiary subject, but may, in suitable cases, consist of deviant implications established ad hoc by the writer.
> (5) The metaphor selects, emphasizes, suppresses, and organizes features of the principal subject by implying statements about it that normally apply to the subsidiary subject.
> (6) This involves shifts in meaning of words belonging to the same family or system as the metaphorical expression and some of these shifts, though not all, may be metaphorical transfers. (The subordinate metaphors are, however, to be read less "emphatically.")
> (7) There is, in general, no simple "ground" for the necessary shifts of meaning - no blanket reason why some metaphors work and others fail.[44]

Black's interaction theory helps us to apprehend several crucial aspects of metaphor's functioning, and incidentally steers a judicious middle course between competing theories which tend toward semantic minimalism or extravagance. Most important is his contention that "the metaphor selects, emphasizes, suppresses, and organizes features of the

principal subject by implying statements about it that normally apply to the subsidiary subject." The metaphoric event is thereby commended to us as an active process, in its semantic and pragmatic import, rather than as a static lexical ultimatum. Thus, when we are told that the state is an "Artificiall Man," we recognize that a range of implications or "commonplaces" associated with the subsidiary subject (Artificiall Man) are being imported into the realm of the principal subject (the state), in an attempt to reorganize our perception of the latter. Following J.L. Austin, we might wish to add that this re-ordering has three dimensions: the illocutionary, particularly interesting in the case of metaphor, as it entails the very creation of a new identity (not similarity) on the speaker's part; the locutionary, which involves the transfer of information by means of the metaphor; and the perlocutionary, which refers to the sum of the metaphor's effects upon the hearer, or reader.[45]

Unlike Paul Ricoeur, Black does not link metaphor's intelligibility to its ability either to discover or to create resemblances between its principal and subsidiary subjects. Ricoeur's theory is perhaps a little too tidy, a theory of the "well-tempered" metaphor; for Ricoeur, imagination "views" the subjects of a metaphor "stereoscopically," actively working a harmony between them.[46] He further says that "there is a structural analogy between the cognitive, the imaginative, and the emotional components of the complete metaphorical act and that the metaphorical process draws its concreteness from this structural analogy and this complementary functioning."[47]

Perhaps there are some metaphors that work this way, but not all metaphors sound like Bach; discordant metaphors abound. If one were to say, for instance, in a playful tone of voice, that "Clyde Wells is just a dear child," the metaphor could well seem to certain listeners a locution conveying practical distrust, while simultaneously serving to bring the same listeners closer to Mr. Wells by its perlocutionary operation; in Ricoeur's terms, a single metaphor could easily engender cognitive disapproval and emotional approval. Metaphor does not always leave one's cognitive, aesthetic, and emotional ducks lined up in a row.

Marx Black is wise, therefore, to shy from the extravagant claims to discursive harmony that flow from Ricoeur's attempt to treat metaphor as productive of interactive resemblances. Black further warns that "metaphor is a loose word, at best, and we must beware of attributing to it stricter rules of usage than are actually found in practice."[48] This, too, is a prudent caution; by steering clear of Ricoeur's over-elaborate taxonomy of metaphor, Black is able to attend faithfully to the variable nature of its effects. By avoiding a definition of metaphor which makes resemblance or its production the key, he is able to account for the "alternation between identity and difference" which marks metaphor in its every aspect.[49]

It may be that Black is too concerned with metaphor's cognitive aspect, to the detriment of the less easily articulated aesthetic experience which it engenders. This is certainly the claim of Donald Davidson, who argues that "metaphors mean what the words, in their most literal interpretation, mean, and nothing more."[50] Davidson takes a

stand on behalf of metaphor's aesthetic purity, which provides some

instructive criticism with respect to Black's account. It is Davidson's

concern to establish that metaphors, like jokes, possess an intrinsic

value unrelated to any information they might convey; in fact, he

asserts that:

> Metaphor runs on the same familiar linguistic
> tracks that the plainest sentences do ....
> What distinguishes metaphor is not meaning but
> use - in this it is like assertion, hinting,
> lying, promising, or criticizing. And the
> special use to which we put language in
> metaphor is not - cannot be - to "say
> something" special, no matter how indirectly.
> For a metaphor _says_ only what shows on its
> face .... [51]

By severing meaning from use, as he does, Davidson sets up a

pernicious dichotomy. The use of language in a community always gives

rise to certain habits and traditions, which, from time to time, are

given shape in customary linguistic patterns. It is the existence of

such linguistic conventions, associations which surpass the literal but

are not radically alien to it, which enables Black to speak of meaning

emerging from the interplay of "associated commonplaces." To deny this

is to deny the significance of connotative meaning, or to banish such

meaning to an extra-linguistic realm, where it surely does not belong.

And connotations in a metaphoric conjunction can convey cognitive

meaning; meaning and usage interpenetrate one another, and, to _some_

extent, the history of usage is legible in text, beyond its strictly

denotative sense. Black's enterprise is, therefore, a legitimate one.

It would be unfortunate if Davidson's strictures prevented us from

saying anything about metaphor.

Davidson is quite correct, however, to dwell upon metaphor's unpredictable and idiosyncratic perlocutionary effects, which transcend the lexical. Interpretation of metaphor is always more than a mere cognitive mapping of its locutionary dimension; it is, moreover, an act of appreciation, variously experienced by various audiences, whose judgements are always open to contest and revision. Davidson could not be more correct when he cautions that:

> ... understanding a metaphor is as much a creative endeavor as making a metaphor, and as little guided by rules .... There are no instructions for devising metaphors; there is no manual for determining what a metaphor "means" or "says"; there is no test for metaphor that does not call for taste.[52]

Metaphor, then, is of interest to us because it involves a collision of subjects, in which the interaction of "associated commonplaces" works upon us to reconfigure perceptions once familiar. Its operation is unpredictable; its interplay of similarity and difference promises no harmonious appropriation of a new truth. While it may have a "point," and may convey a certain "metaphorical meaning," the extent of such meaning is open to question. It is, above all else, a prompter of images, which creates an experience.[53]

Because metaphor is not, as Davidson points out, primarily a vehicle of locutionary meaning, but an experiential manifold, it can serve as a matrix for the development of narrative. Metaphorical meaning, in the broadest sense, "is a universal or poetic meaning, and can sustain a number of varying and yet consistent renderings of its discursive meaning, just as a myth can sustain a number of historical

exempla.[54] Such renderings are, by and large, metonymic; they seize
upon some aspect of the generative metaphor as the beginning of a chain
of explication which is a chain of substitution.   And, as Northrop Frye
reminds us, in politics such metonymic chains go by the name of
ideology.[55]

Audition, Vision, and Nostalgia for Plato

In the beginning, our cultural beginning, was the word, but which
word? Logos or dabhar?   Our dual heritage, our indebtedness to Athens
and to Jerusalem, leaves us prone to a painful confusion on this score.

Logos is the Greek word for "word," and dabhar is the Hebrew word
for "word," this much is clear.   But two more different words could
hardly be imagined. Dabhar is an active word; it also means "deed," and
it comes from the verb "to speak."[56] Logos, on the other hand, derives
from the root meaning "to arrange"; "the deepest level of meaning in the
term ... [is] nothing which has to do with the function of speaking —
neither dynamic spokenness, as was the case for the entire Orient, nor
the articulateness of utterance — but the meaning, the ordered and
reasonable content."[57]

The narratives of ancient Greek and Hebrew thought were organized
by the operation of two strikingly different metaphors, metaphors of
sight and hearing, respectively. The Hebrew word is a speaking, a deed,
whereas the Greek word is an ordered arrangement of meaning; the former
word is heard,   the latter   seen.   While these   metaphors are

unquestionably historical, cultural artefacts, whose metonymic explication is in the nature of a chain of contingent interpretive choices, they derive their force from their appeal to a preconceptual experience of embodied existence.[58] The metaphors mediate the power and immediacy of everyday experience, in this case the experience of vision and audition, into "shared cultural modes of experience," which "help to determine the nature of our meaningful, coherent understanding of our 'world'."[59] Because these metaphors have a public character, it is possible to explore their implications, as a sort of phenomenological exercise; because of their role in shaping understandings of the world, it is important to do so.

Reflecting on the implications associated with vision and audition, the narrator of Nabokov's Ada, or Ardor remarks, "If my eye tells me something about Space, my ear tells me something about Time. But while Space can be contemplated, naively, perhaps, yet directly, I can listen to Time only between stresses .... "[60] Thus Nabokov aptly sums up the modes of representation to which seeing and hearing lend themselves, or, perhaps more properly, the modes of thinking which they metaphorize.

The Hebrew metaphor of the word as something heard imparted a temporal quality to their conception of thinking; "as space was the given thought-form for the Greeks, so for the Hebrews it was time."[61] For the Hebrews, even objects or things were conceived as instruments of a dynamic reality. It is not surprising then, that their conception of knowledge was a dynamic, temporal one. Truth itself was represented in

terms consonant with the "impressions gained by hearing," which partake
of the following three characteristics:

> ... they are constantly changing, they are of
> a dynamic-qualitative sort because they can be
> expressed in all degrees of intensity and in
> varying qualities, and they are
> psychologically meaningful because they can
> awake every possible mood or feeling.[62]

Knowledge metaphorically conceived as hearing partakes of a certain
tentative character, for we hear things, of necessity, in temporally
contingent succession. Such knowing requires a cultivation of patience;
Mozart's Don Giovanni is not Don Giovanni if the notes are played and
sung all at once - we must wait for the music to unfold in its own good
time.[63] Likewise, when we are in conversation, temporality is of the
essence; we are always dependent upon our interlocutors for whatever it
is that comes next. Listening, as a state of dependence, is
"assimilative, receptive, passive, and [in a traditional sense]
feminine"; it does not afford the same sense of certainty of
systematicity that is traditionally proper to the visual experience.[64]
When theory is conceived metaphorically as listening, therefore, it
seems unlikely that its practitioners will make certainty or system
their first priorities; on the contrary, "an intensification of
receptivity, gentleness, femininity, understanding, discretion,
openness, and tolerance" become the chief theoretical or interpretive
virtues.[65]

The metaphor of knowledge as hearing, of theory as listening, has
been subordinated in the history of Western thought to theory conceived
as seeing, along Greek lines. Camille Paglia maintains that Judeo-

Christian iconoclasm never succeeded in wooing Western culture away from its devotion to visual imagery. "Historiography's most glaring error," she writes, "has been its assertion that Judeo-Christianity defeated paganism ... [which] has survived in the thousand forms of sex, art, and now the modern media."[66] Quintessentially, our civilization's knowing is conditioned by the "delusional certitude" of a visual metaphor:

> Name and person are part of the west's quest
> for form. The west insists on the discrete
> identity of objects. To name is to know; to
> know is to control .... The westerner knows by
> seeing. Perceptual relations are at the heart
> of our culture, and they have produced our
> titanic contributions to art. Walking in
> nature, we see, identify, name, recognize.
> This recognition is our apotropaion, that is,
> our warding off of fear.[67]

Philosophy, as much as any of the arts, has sought a certitude which could help to relieve the fears of its practitioners. Knowledge, truth, certainty, were for the ancient Greeks to be secured by a sort of "contemplative looking," a recognition of objects before the Eye of the Mind.[68]

Consider, for example, Plato's employment of visual metaphor in the Symposium. The quest for knowledge is described by the sage Diotima as coterminous with the search for beauty; the true and the beautiful are conjointly manifested in discrete, visible form. The appropriation of knowledge proceeds by means of the contemplation and articulation of progressively more universal phenomena. The philosopher must first contemplate one beautiful individual, allowing his passion to "give life to noble discourse."[69] Then, he must learn to appreciate the kinship between this loved one's beauty of form and that which subsists in all

others. As his initiation continues, he will be led successively to the
contemplation of beautiful souls, the beauty of customs and practices,
and the beauty of the sciences, until finally, he ascends to fulfillment
in the contemplation and articulation of a truly universal knowledge:

> ... turning his eyes toward the open sea of
> beauty, he will find in such contemplation the
> seed of the most fruitful discourse and the
> loftiest thought, and reap a golden harvest of
> philosophy, until, confirmed and strengthened,
> he will come upon one single form of knowledge
> .... [70]

Thus, Plato prescribes an investigative and descriptive process
that is progressively conceptually general, until at length a universal,
monistic knowledge is attained. Physical loveliness, moral integrity,
and the practices of institutions are not properly understood until
their forms have been seen and transfigured into the discourse of the
philosopher. Vision, comprehension, and articulation are the steps by
which the philosopher ascends to the possibility of a theory of
practice.

The Greek tradition, then, "employs space as the primary mode of
thought"; philosophy is a kind of gazing into the metaphysical
heavens.[71] Intimations of truth, like the visual perception of things
in the environment, must "chiefly be based on those images which have
form, objectivity, and immutability."[72]

Visual metaphors, imported into political theory, create a set of
meta-theoretical assumptions quite different from those engendered by
auditory metaphors. Visual metaphors turn theoretical attention toward
space, suppressing time.   When looking at a picture, William Poteat

tells us, it is easy to engage in a process of abstraction. Although the eyes are in motion, scanning the surface of the picture, it is easy to envision the picture as whole, complete, and "all there." In Poteat's words, one sees "in an instant without temporal density an at once finite, static, and eternal spatial configuration whose 'parts' are determinate and sensuously simultaneously co-present in (visual) space with each other and with the totality they jointly comprise."[73] The total picture is "finite, determinate, static, self-contained, complete in itself, making no allusions to anything beyond its own boundaries."[74]

When visual metaphors serve to catalyze theoretical consciousness, they generate an expectation that good theory will organize a field that is finite, determinate, static, self-contained, and complete in itself. Visual metaphors for theory generate a certain optimism, as well, for if theorizing were seeing, it would greatly aid the theorist in the work of discriminating and distinguishing between phenomena, in generating precise but synoptic descriptions of phenomena, and in apprehending the significance of the whole field of study.[75]

Visual metaphors impart stability to the objects of theoretical concern, and authority to the theorist. This effect is heightened in the further intensification of visual experience to which typography has contributed. Psychically, the printed text prompts the "illusion that space is visual, uniform, and continuous," and that its constituents can be manipulated with precision and uniformity.[76] The metaphor of politics as printed text encourages the theorist in a search for incontrovertible conclusions about political issues, conclusions which

will be as plain as the words printed on a page; "a written philosophy, and especially a printed one, will naturally make 'certitude' the primary object of knowledge, just as the scholar in a print culture can have acceptance for his accuracy even though he have nothing to say."[77] Taken to its furthest extreme, the metaphor can induce a perspective which Leatherdale has dubbed "alphabetism":

> This is the notion that the understanding of complex phenomena is essentially a matter of isolating an inherent and finite range of stable elements and charting the range of their permutations. It is a notion of understanding ... that gains strength from the alphabet as a model, from musical notation, the Arabic number system, and precious little else. Acceptance of the model presupposes that, even if we cannot find all or even any of them, the elements exist, although we have no other reason to assume a range of such elements and often search vainly for them and the evidence of their kaleidoscopic potential.[78]

So described, few theorists would wish to endorse an "alphabetic" conception of understanding; it seems altogether too crude and naive. But the metaphor of politics as a printed text is a strong one, calling as it does upon a vivid and pervasive everyday experience; it would be surprising if the use of the metaphor failed to tempt its proponents occasionally to describe political phenomena as being somewhat simpler and stabler than they are. For metaphor is not only a creative figure; it is also a potentially subversive one. Political theories, like poems, operate at more than a simple level of meaning; their explicit commitments are shadowed by an "underthought," "the progression of imagery and metaphor that supplies an emotional counterpoint to the

surface meaning, which it often supplements, but also often contradicts."[79]

Political theory may strive to be sensitive to complexity, to offer its account in such a fashion that the vicissitudes of history and the intricacies of language are always taken into consideration. Should it conceive of this task in terms of a visual metaphor, however, it will not be long before the charms of simplicity and certitude begin to reassert themselves; meta-theory that describes knowing as seeing takes for its own, unwittingly, a peculiarly powerful underthought, a dream of the ocean of beauty, a kind of nostalgia for Plato.

CHAPTER III

CHARLES TAYLOR, ARTICULATION, AND UNDERSTANDING

Self-Interpretation and Articulation

The articulation of human experience in language is a tricky business. Those who are satisfied with metaphor, the poets and theologians, have traditionally been the most circumspect about our capacity to adequately articulate our experiences. Reinhold Niebuhr, the American neo-orthodox theologian, maintains that moral significance is typically expressed outside the bounds of locutionary utterance:

> ... individual selfhood is expressed in the self's capacity for self-transcendence and not in its rational capacity for conceptual and analytic procedures [emphasis mine]. Thus a consistent idealism and a consistent naturalism both obscure the dimension of selfhood, the former by equating the self with universal reason (as in Plato and Hegel), and the latter by reducing the self to an unfree nature not capable of viewing itself and the world from the position transcending the flow of events, causes, and sequences.[1]

Niebuhr expresses scepticism about the possibility of developing any precise theoretical explanation of man's nature or practices. The self, he speculates, is a complex interaction amongst the natural creature, who is bound to natural causality; the rational creature, who analyses, understands, and masters natural causality; and the self-transcendant creature, who is able to survey and to judge both the world and the self, and to plot a course of action in accordance with his judgements.[2] Given this inherent complexity, he argues, the nature of

man and of his practices are bound to remain, in their fullest extent, opaque. Human practice, as a paradoxical unity of events determined and free, is therefore susceptible of representation only in "poetic, religious, and metaphorical symbols."[3]

Charles Taylor, in this respect an heir to both Plato and Hegel, stakes his theoretical aspirations on the capacity of language to articulate the meaning of human practices in a satisfying fashion. Taylor's "philosophical anthropology" is an attempt to offer a hermeneutical account of man's self-interpretation, as it is articulated in language, which will circumvent the problems of a too consistent idealism or a too consistent naturalism. In the hands of practitioners like Martin Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer, hermeneutics does avoid naturalism's deterministic nihilism and idealism's unsustainable claims for human rationality by taking care to consider the import of our self-interpretations, or symbolic actions, as they are constituted in language and history. Taylor's hermeneutics, however, is undone by his reliance upon visual metaphor, which serves as the occasion for his overreaching himself. He claims more than his theory can reasonably deliver; following Bourdieu, his meta-theory endorses the possibility of a theory of practice. That is, Taylor believes that a good hermeneutical theory should be able to stand in judgement over all social and political practices, including theoretical practices.

Taylor avoids the excesses of naturalist social science, which, he argues, is an inevitably reductionist enterprise; its theories "lead to very bad science: either they end up in wordy elaborations of the

obvious, or they fail altogether to address the interesting questions, or their practitioners end up squandering their talents and ingenuity in the attempt to show that they can after all recapture the insights of ordinary life in their manifestly reductive explanatory languages."[4]

Why is this the case? Taylor suggests that a natural-science-inspired model of politics is doomed to inadequacy or irrelevancy because it ignores, by its very nature, some key aspects of man's constitution as subject. In his article, "Interpretation and the Sciences of Man," Taylor traces the provenance of modern social science to its beginnings in the post-Cartesian dialogue between rationalism and empiricism. Rationalism, which posits a congruence or correspondence between reason and "reality," between mental processes and the world outside, seeks an understanding of social reality which would be ineluctable, inescapable. As Taylor notes, the rationalist quest culminates in the writings of Hegel, who attempted to show the necessity of apparent contingency, so that, in the final analysis, "the bad leads to the good, the passions to reason, contradiction and conflict to synthesis and peace."[5]

The empiricists, on the other hand, have traditionally sought certainty in another fashion, by appealing to the purportedly irreducible data of sensory experience as the foundation of scientific knowledge. The rootedness of science (as conceived by the empiricists) in non-subjective sense data or, as Taylor puts it, "brute data, enables a process of inerrant verification which is beyond subjective fiat."[6] Both rationalist and empiricist goals are fulfilled in logical

empiricism, which couples empiricist notions of data collection and hypothesis verification with a logical form of inference; logical empiricism links the ideas of empirical verification and conceptual entailment, thereby systematizing the quest for prediction and control of environmental phenomena.[7]

Taylor criticizes the logical empiricists and their intellectual descendants for failing to recognize that human activity cannot be described merely in terms of brute sense data, and that it cannot be categorized and manipulated in the same way as non-human reality. Human beings, like other creatures, have desires. We are unique, however, insofar as we express second-order desires, which are a product of our ability to reflect upon our more elemental wants. "Second-order" evaluation is manifested in two ways: it may be concerned with our desires' instrumental import (rather like the Freudian ego); or, it may be a "strong evaluation," concerned with our desires' moral worth (rather like the Freudian superego). It is crucial to Taylor's argument that both kinds of evaluation are qualitative, not quantitative, in nature. That is, they cannot be understood in terms of a common denominator reducible to an objective measurement of brute data. Human self-evaluation is elusive in a way that natural phenomena are not.[8]

Strong evaluation is construed, in Taylor's work, as a basic staple of psychic existence, as that which makes human communication possible.[9] Our everyday account of things is a teleological one; we define actions less in terms of their physical dynamics than of their motivation and purpose.[10] The human capacity for strong evaluation, for making

contrastive moral decisions about the worth of desires and actions, is the capacity which generates our teleological perspective. Any social science which fails to account for the workings of strong evaluation has missed a crucial point, ignored a characteristically human activity — self-evaluation. In an effort to provide a pat, objectified schema of human action, naturalist social science forfeits understanding. In its dissection of human beings as objects, such a social science ignores the purposive dimensions of action; it forgets that human beings are subjects. Any useful social science, says Taylor, must offer a convincing account of human agency. An insightful social science must not be lashed to archaic notions of verification from brute data:

> We cannot measure such sciences against the requirement of a science of verification: we cannot judge them by their predictive capacity. We have to accept that they are founded on intuitions which all do not share, and what is worse, that these intuitions are bound up with our fundamental options. These sciences cannot be wertfrei; they are moral sciences .... their successful prosecution requires a high degree of self-knowledge, a freedom from illusion .... [11]

If traditional social science ignores the factors which constitute social life and meaning, refusing to grapple with the problem of human self-understanding, how are we to attain the self-knowledge of which Taylor speaks? Taylor himself has not fully answered this question, but he has offered an embryonic alternative in the form of his proposed "hermeneutical science of man."[12]

Taylor's hermeneutics is based upon his notion of the distinctive character of human agency. As we have seen, his concept of self-

evaluation is most important; the idea that humans can reflect upon and judge their desires assumes a still greater importance, as this kind of evaluation is subsumed under the broader rubric of "self-interpretation." For Taylor, humans are primarily and uniquely "self-interpreting animals." In his article of the same name, he neatly summarizes his claims about self-interpretation. He argues:

> 1. that some of our emotions involve import-ascriptions;
> 2. that some of these imports are subject-referring;
> 3. that our subject-referring feelings are the basis of our understanding of what it is to be human;
> 4. that these feelings are constituted by the articulations we come to accept of them; and
> 5. that these articulations, which we can think of as interpretations, require language.[13]

The last two assertions, for our purposes, are the most interesting ones. For Taylor has condensed the fog of feeling into pristine droplets of language. Our contrastive, evaluative notions of good and bad, right and wrong, are tied up with our emotions, and this complex of evaluation and concomitant emotion attaches to us, as subjects; in fact, it is this complex of evaluation and emotion that defines our understanding of our own humanity. Note that Taylor proceeds to claim that these subject-referring feelings are constituted by (not expressed, but constituted by) articulations which, of course, take their particular form in language. It is impossible to miss the pre-eminence accorded to language in this scheme; language articulates, constitutes, determines feelings. Our self-understandings are constituted by language; it would seem to follow that they can be made explicit in

language. In fact, Taylor goes so far as to hang human identity on the peg of language, as did Aristotle before him.[14]

Taylor is perhaps even more insistent about the primacy of language than his predecessor, pressing home the claim that "man is a _language animal_ [emphasis mine], not just because he can formulate things and make representations, and thus think of matters and calculate, which animals cannot; but also because what we consider the essential human concerns are disclosed only in language, and can only be the concerns of a language animal."[15]

One must be on guard against the presumption that Taylor's theory of language is a simple one, or crude; on the contrary, it is subtle and sophisticated. On the whole, Taylor tends toward a Cassirer-like view of the catholicity of language, allowing that it may be considered to encompass "the whole range of meaningful media," extending to music, art, and dance.[16] On this view, a physical action, such as mopping one's brow in the presence of another on a hot summer's day, could be considered not merely a communication, but an actual use of language: the brow-wiping is a sign, an expression which discloses a "shared experience," the enjoyment of "a complicity."[17]

This theory of language is not unproblematic; it posits a notion of language which becomes a conceptual gourmand, gobbling up any form of human interaction which involves communication. And this is a considerable meal, for, as Murray Edelman notes in his _Politics as Symbolic Action_, a wide range of governmental and social practices serve as means of communication.[18] Indeed, it is hard to imagine any encounter

between two people that could be void of communication of some sort; even passivity, or one of the interlocutors' quietly nodding off to sleep, could be construed as a communication, a "disclosure" of sorts; certainly it is a shared experience, in some respect. Can experience shared in such a way, however, properly be termed "linguistic"? Is there not a class of embodied acts, which serve as media of communication, but which can appropriately be distinguished from language?

Taylor makes much of the fact that such physical actions as brow-wiping, although they cannot be considered a form of normal conversation, create "a rapport which is typically that of language animals."[19] Is Taylor labelling primarily non-verbal forms of communication "language," simply because we, the "language animals," employ them? A mother cat nursing her young may enjoy a certain "complicity" with them, of a purposive kind which might even deserve the designation "intelligent"; hunting chimpanzees may communicate with one another as they collaborate in the entrapment of their prey, albeit in a non-assertoric way, "concerned with conveying mood or menace or invitation, not with making statements about things in the world."[20] Would Taylor wish to account such complicities and communications, purposive as they are, as instances of language use? Judging from his remarks about the status of humanity as the uniquely language-using species, probably not.

It seems, then, that there may be a useful distinction to be made between linguistic and non-linguistic forms of communication. Such a

distinction need not weaken an expressivist view of language, nor discount the subtle interpenetration of language into other forms of communication and action. William Connolly, for example, although acknowledging that language helps to invest the totality of human practice with coherence, form, and meaning, believes it important to avoid adopting a theory of language which would make all activity, in effect, language.[21] It is simply convenient to distinguish language from other forms of communication, granting, of course, that the boundary will never be anything but hazy and conventional; an analytic term which has acquired a universal significance no longer has any significance at all.

By adopting such a broad definition of language, however, Taylor furthers his theoretical agenda. The ambiguity of his definition makes it much simpler to maintain that all our subject-referring feelings, the primal stuff of self-understanding, are articulated in and shaped by language. Language, so liberally conceived, seems better able to bear the burden placed upon it as the locus of meaning, the universal medium of disclosure, which articulates, bringing about an "explicit awareness", which constitutes public space, and which discloses and constitutes the distinctions of merit so central to human self-understanding. In short, "essential human concerns are disclosed only in language."[22]

Taylor's development of something approximating a proposal for a hermeneutic theory of practice hinges upon his account of this process of disclosure. He espouses, not a theory which would help us to predict

the course that social practice might take, but rather a theory which would illumine practice sufficiently to show up certain practices as errors. This is a large claim, redolent, in its scope, of Gadamer's claims for the universality of the hermeneutic "problem," as a unified striving for understanding, interpretation, and application.[23]   Taylor is markedly less informed by Gadamer's warning that hermeneutics should not be regarded as "a system of rules to describe, let alone direct, the methodical procedure of the human sciences."[24]   For Taylor, some such method, while not a present actuality, clearly seems to be both desirable and, in some measure, attainable.

Taylor's belief in the possibility of a hermeneutical theory of practice begins with his conviction that language is the exclusive medium by which essential human concerns are expressed.   The self-interpretation characteristic of the individual is replicated, on a macroscopic scale, in society.   This larger complex of self-interpretations, the web of meanings which emerges in communal interchange, embodies "a certain self-definition, a vision of the agent and his society, which is that of the society or community"; following from Taylor's conception of language, these communal interpretations are seen to be articulable in language, and can be "re-expressed or made explicit by a science of politics."[25]

Despite Taylor's protest that one need not be a Platonist in order to perceive and perspicuously describe an ordered, logomorphic social world, the ring of his declarations is distinctly reminiscent of Plato's Symposium.[26] Practices can be made intelligible as they are brought

into speech or print, as they are transformed into articulate discourse. Social practices, because they are the activity of "language animals," are inevitably brought to speech, transformed into self-interpretations. These self-interpretations help to fix the form of the social practices which spawned them; they are the theorist's raw material, but they are not his creation. The task of the keen-eyed theorist is to perceive the patterns peculiar to a given set of self-interpretations, and to bring those patterns to light; thus, "we could say that social theory arises when we try to formulate explicitly what we are doing, describe the activity which is central to a practice, and articulate the norms which are essential to it."[27] The goal of the hermeneutical theorist is to faithfully and perspicuously describe the pattern of understandings which animates the community; it is a search for clarity.

Taylor's hermeneutic theory of practice, as proposed, cannot appeal to any evidence which is foundational and beyond dispute, as empirical political science claims to do. Taylor's method simply relies upon extensive and critical readings of social self-interpretations, which, in their totality, constitute the pages of a "text-analogue."[28] The theorist is a reader, poring over this text like a careful editor, who, at the close of his labours, ensures that the text is replaced "by another text, one which is clearer."[29] The operative skill demanded of the hermeneutic editor is insight. Of course, there is no guarantee that the theorist's insight into the social text will be shared; it is, as Taylor concedes, "unformalizable." Failure to concur in a sound hermeneutic judgement can only be attributed to a lack of insight, to a

"failure to grasp the meaning field in question, an inability to make
and understand readings of this field."[30]

Why Taylor considers this hermeneutic "reading" to be a science,
rather than an art, is not entirely clear. Nonetheless, he firmly
maintains that the method should enable one to distinguish between a
superior and an inferior interpretation:

> ... some differences will be non-arbitrable by
> further evidence, but that each side can only
> make an appeal to deeper insight on the part
> of the other. The superiority of one position
> over another will thus consist in this, that
> from the more adequate position one can
> understand one's own stand and that of one's
> opponent, but not the other way around. It
> goes without saying that this argument can
> only have weight for the superior position.[31]

Discerning what is the correct interpretation of social phenomena
is thus a matter of insight, of seeing with the mind's eye the true
configuration of social phenomena. It necessitates being in the right
position, adopting the right vantage point, so that one can fully survey
the meaning field in question. One must be seated at a comfortable
reading distance. As Marshall McLuhan reminds us, "the printed book, an
extension of the visual faculty, intensified perspective and the fixed
point of view."[32] For Taylor's hermeneutics, the question of position
is crucial. It is not surprising that, confronted with the work of
Michel Foucault, a thinker who refused to stand his ground in any one
position for very long (who lived, in fact, as a theoretical wanderer)
Taylor's reaction is one of indignation, remarking that, "in his major
works ... Foucault _sounds_ as though he believed that, as an historian,
he could stand nowhere .... "[33]

Once he has attained a commanding view of the text-analogue, however, it becomes possible to offer "a perspicuous account of the good or norm which is the point of a certain practice"; moreover, such a perspective enables the theorist to determine what theory offers the best account of a society's practices.[34] Taylor suggests, as a meta-theoretical proposition, that theories themselves can be validated or disconfirmed, in accordance with the perspicuity of the understanding they provide, and the quality of the practices that they inspire. That is, the operative question would seem to be: does theory 'x,' which purports to honour perceived good 'y,' inform and constitute practices which further the attainment of 'y'? If not, the theory is obviously internally flawed, or self-defeating. A theory which offered a superior explanation and self-definition for society's practices would be considered "objectively validated" in its "self-defining use."[35] It must be remembered, however, that a theory of practice, as the social text's master narrative, would be difficult for the adherents of an inferior theory to recognize; for people labouring under the burden of an illusion are incapable of grasping a superior hermeneutic account, until they are touched by insight.

Good theory, according to Taylor, is able to spot illusion, that is, "something of greater substance than error, error which in a sense builds a counterfeit reality of its own."[36] Once an illusion has been discovered, theory's therapeutic duty is clear:

> It may not just be that to understand a
> certain explanation one has to sharpen one's
> intuitions, it may be that one has to change
> one's orientation - if not in adopting another

> orientation, at least in living one's own in a way that allows for greater comprehension of others. Thus, in the sciences of man in so far as they are hermeneutical there can be a valid response to 'I don't understand' which takes the form, not only 'develop your intuitions,' but more radically 'change yourself.'[37]

The political text, polity's text, is in the final analysis a palimpsest, whose pages are held up for the theorist's inspection, inwardly surveyed by his mind's eye, and then quickly effaced, that he might write upon them a clearer, truer tale.

Critique: On Understanding

For Charles Taylor, theory's essence is articulation, and articulation is the task of achieving a certain kind of clarity by bringing an issue into focus; "to find a description ... is to identify a feature of the matter at hand and thereby to grasp its contour, to get a proper view of it."[38] Taylor defends his reliance on visual metaphor to conceive of articulation, and the theoretical process as a whole, in the following terms:

> [In the description of articulation] I find myself using visual metaphors, which are the ones that seem to come naturally to us, at least in our civilization, when describing what is involved in articulation. The point of these metaphors is that coming to articulate our sense of some matter is inseparable from coming to identify its features. It is these that our descriptions pick out; and having an articulated view of something is grasping how the different features or aspects are related.[39]

Now, it is no great secret that Taylor looks upon contemporary French philosophy and literary theory with some distaste, referring to their productions somewhat disparagingly as "the fog emanating from Paris in recent decades."[40] (It is of course not an easy thing to grasp the contour of a thick fog.) Taylor is also less than enamoured of what he calls "political atomism," or an "individualism preoccupied with individual choices and the associations formed from such choices to the neglect of the matrix in which such choices can be open or closed, rich or meagre."[41] But herein lies a paradox, for, as Arthur Danto has noted, the distinctive contribution of French structuralism and post-structuralism has been to promote a concern for textual holism, and to expand upon "the concept of the text to integrate history, culture, [and] psychology, as well as to revolutionize the reading of literature narrowly considered."[42] For all their attention to rupture and disjunctures in the text, structuralism and post-structuralism struggled against atomistic conceptions of language.[43]

On the other hand, the visual metaphor to which Taylor is so indebted is the very spawning ground of the atomistic individual identity which he finds so troubling. The individual is in a sense a creation of the visual, an incarnation of ocular objectivity; "the hardest object of Apollonian thing-making is western personality, the glamorous, striving, separatist ego that entered literature in the Iliad .... "[44] Although Taylor manages to avoid a political atomism based on the cult of the individual, his acceptance of visual metaphor as the image which comes "most naturally" seduces him into textual atomism, and

a consequent disregard for elements of understanding alien to the spirit
of the printed page: the integrity of the tacit, the creative role of
ambiguity, and the polyvalent instability of language.

In his introduction to The Power of Myth, a collection of
interviews with the renowned scholar of mythology, Joseph Campbell, Bill
Moyers relates the following anecdote:

> In Japan for an international conference on
> religion, Campbell overheard another American
> delegate, a social philosopher from New York,
> say to a Shinto priest, "We've been now to a
> good many ceremonies and have seen quite a few
> of your shrines. But I don't get your
> ideology. I don't get your theology." The
> Japanese paused as though in deep thought and
> then slowly shook his head. "I think we don't
> have ideology," he said. "We don't have
> theology. We dance."[45]

"Can I not say," asks Ludwig Wittgenstein, "a cry, a laugh, are
full of meaning?"[46] Contra Taylor, articulation is not the sine qua non
of meaning, the sole guarantor of its presence. As humans,
unquestionably, our existence is at all times conditioned by language;
however, it does not seem unreasonable to entertain the possibility that
some modalities of our practice are not primarily linguistic in their
execution or import. Activities such as music and dance are not easily
translated into discourse, not readily formalized in a conceptual way.
A laugh or a cry (or a metaphor) not only conveys an experience; it is
an experience in itself, and in such instances a literal articulation or
paraphrase which attempts to capture the experience "inevitably says too
much - and with the wrong emphasis."[47] It is really impossible to grasp
the contour of a laugh or a cry, and yet Wittgenstein maintains that

they are full of meaning; although empty or elusive in a locutionary sense, in a perlocutionary sense they powerfully convey mood or menace or invitation. Wittgenstein says simply that "much can be gathered from them."[48]

A recognition of the tacit dimension of understanding is essential to the cultivation of an attitude of theoretical circumspection; there is only so much that the language of theory can accomplish. Martin Heidegger, one of the pioneers of contemporary hermeneutics, and in some respects a model for Charles Taylor, describes language as "the house of Being," not as Being itself.[49] Although we may presume that it is a comfortable structure, in which the occupant is pleased to dwell, it is unlikely that all the doors and windows are locked, else it would be no longer a house, but a prison.

According to Heidegger, all participants in discursive practice are always caught up in a hermeneutic circle of understanding. The practical consequence of this idea is that we are all implicated in a network of "pre-understandings," of which we are only dimly aware. When we approach any problem, we bring to it a hypothesis, or _Vorgriff_, which is rooted in _Vorsicht_, or "foresight." This _Vorsicht_ is a theoretical pre-understanding, which consists of the "vocabulary or conceptual scheme we bring to any problem."[50] The notion of _Vorsicht_ seems implicit in much of what Taylor has to say about the constitutive and expressive nature of self-interpretations, as they are perceived against a background of "moral rules, standards of excellence, pictures of good and bad life-forms ...."[51]

More importantly for our purposes, however, Heidegger describes a third mode of pre-understanding, Vorhabe, or "fore-having," which is essentially pre-verbal. This concept makes a radical distinction between theory and practice, a distinction which Taylor's theory of language partially effaces. Vorhabe encompasses the matrix of practice within which all theorizing takes place; these practices are not readily translated into articulate "self-interpretations," but rather exist as embodied activities which impart an implicit grasp of our situation. Understanding Vorhabe disposes the theorist toward "an ontology which is in our practices as ways of behaving towards things and people, not in our minds as background assumptions which we happen to be taking for granted."[52]

In order to understand the difficulty inherent in translating our practices into language, it is important to recognize that many of our practices are best described as learned skills. Such skills embody a certain kind of knowledge which is tacit in nature:

> Although the expert diagnostician, taxonomist and cotton-classer can indicate their clues and formulate their maxims, they know many more things than they can tell, knowing them only in practice, as instrumental particulars, and not explicitly, as objects. The knowledge of such particulars is therefore ineffable, and the pondering of a judgement in terms of such particulars is an ineffable process of thought. This applies equally to connoisseurship as the art of knowing and to skills as the art of doing, wherefore both can be taught only by the aid of practical example and never solely by precept.[53]

Embodied skills as complex as playing a Rachmaninoff piano concerto and as simple as riding a bicycle are equally resistant to theoretical

reduction. Verbal formulae might be devised to make a gesture in the direction of describing such skills, but it is impossible to capture them entirely, especially in the dimensions of ontological significance with which Heidegger was concerned. In order to understand a musical theme, one must make reference, not to a verbal description, but to another musical theme.[54] Perhaps it is not absurd to suggest that certain politically significant skills and understandings partake of this "tacit knowing" to a considerable extent as well, such that they are best conveyed by example rather than precept. If such were the case, Taylor's theorist ought to go beyond asking his recalcitrant interlocutors to sharpen their intuitions, beyond even asking them to "change themselves"; he ought to offer them a demonstration.

Taylor's hermeneutics, in attempting to bring social phenomena into focus, to attain an inter-subjectively valid grasp of their meaning, fails to appreciate the subtle uses of ambiguity in political discourse. In politics (as might seem obvious) clarity is not always a virtue; in theory, it is not always attainable. ("Is it even always an advantage to replace an indistinct picture by a sharp one?", asks Wittgenstein. "Isn't the indistinct one often exactly what we need?")[55]

In situations characterized by political dispute or controversy, ambiguous terms often serve as bridges between competing factions, upon which political actors, and theorists, may come and go. The wide reception of the works of Edmund Burke and Thomas Paine in an age of considerable political strife, to take up one example, is a response which can be explained "stylistically as well as doctrinally":

> Their success in reaching extensive, and otherwise often divided, audiences and setting down the terms of debate over the French Revolution rested in large part upon their ability to select and manipulate an adaptable, but by no means entirely malleable, inheritance of political vocabulary comprising such symbols as the Norman Yoke and the Glorious Revolution as well as such abstract clefs mots as reason, custom, and nature.[56]

Perspicuous clarity helps to define and delimit an audience, but such definition is not always the problem. Political theory is of little use if no one will listen; therefore, "the writer whose appeal is to a heterogeneous audience, or whose purpose is to enlarge his audience, or to redefine an agenda of dispute, is greatly aided by a sensitivity toward the ambiguous."[57] This may seem mercenary, a consideration worthy of political hacks rather than political theorists, but nothing could be further from the truth. The problem of redefining contested terminology is of particular concern to theory. The ambiguity inherent in the terms "liberty" and "freedom," for example, enabled John Stuart Mill to advocate state intervention in some situations, and forbearance in others, as being by turns conducive to liberty. His position was a highly individualized one, and is difficult for contemporary theorists to reduce to any schematic description. Nonetheless, Conal Condren argues, Mill's conceptually "muddy" account of liberty made good sense of the political flux he witnessed in nineteenth-century Britain, and therefore anyone attempting to understand his work ought to be wary of any impulse to "clean it up."[58] The clearest, most perspicuous account may not always be the one that does the most to further understanding of texts or social phenomena.

Perhaps the most worrisome effect of the metaphor of social self-interpretation as text, in Taylor's formulation at least, is its intimation that these self-interpretations are stable, visible entities within a field of meaning. This account of things draws attention away from the dynamic, unstable, political nature of discourse. As a fragmented system, with an objective inter-subjective manifestation, discourse may be put to a great variety of (often conflicting) uses:

> ... it is in discourse that power and knowledge are joined together. And for this very reason, we must conceive discourse as a series of discontinuous segments whose tactical function is neither uniform nor stable. To be more precise, we must not imagine a world of discourse divided between accepted discourse and excluded discourse, or between the dominant discourse and the dominated one; but as a multiplicity of discursive elements that can come into play in various strategies.[59]

When discursive self-interpretation is conceived in terms of a multiplicity of textual elements, the notion of the possibility of a theory of practice recedes, and it becomes apparent that one overarching interpretation may not do justice to the practices in question. The task of hermeneutics thus emerges as "the problem of minimizing the distorting, simplifying, and anachronistically assimilating propensities of our language when used to describe a temporally alien one."[60]

Taylor's hermeneutics, unfortunately, exacerbates these "simplifying and anachronistically assimilating" properties of language by identifying social events with language itself. The synoptic power of language all too easily covers over subtle variations of practice, self-interpretation, and meaning which, like tiny fissures in a fresco,

divide factions, cultures, and generations from one another. The visual certitude which accompanies Taylor's concept of articulation can even make us forget the problems that attend the question of the meaning of meaning.

Throughout his work, Taylor consistently and unproblematically represents meaning as a concomitant of articulation, as something "available upon inspection." The term, so represented, takes on a comfortable air of familiarity. When Taylor attempts to give a historical account of meaning, however, problems arise.

In Sources of the Self, his study of the development of the modern identity, Taylor argues that the modern age faces a crisis of meaning, a crisis our civilization has not confronted before. In past centuries, if anything, Western man was weighed down by a terrifying surfeit of meaning. The present crisis, however, is a genuine crisis of meaning because the world has lost its "spiritual contour."[61] So far, so good; Taylor defines meaning as the articulation of a world-view; suggests that we, unlike any previous generation, cannot articulate a satisfying or comprehensive world-view; and therefore concludes that ours is the first era to suffer a genuine crisis of meaning. He proceeds to offer an example illustrative of our unique predicament:

> To see the contrast [between this and previous ages], think of Luther, in his intense anguish and distress before his liberating moment of insight about salvation through faith, his sense of inescapable condemnation, irretrievably damning himself through the very instruments of salvation, the sacraments. However one might want to describe this, it was not a crisis of meaning [emphasis mine].[62]

Luther seemed, however, to take a somewhat different view of his "moment of insight":

> Night and day I pondered until I saw the connection between the justice of God and the statement that "the just shall live by his faith" .... Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise. The whole of Scripture took on a new meaning [emphasis mine], and whereas before the "justice of God" had filled me with hate, now it became inexpressibly sweet 63

Why was Luther's crisis not a "crisis of meaning"? For Taylor to admit such a thing would deal a fatal blow to his aspirations for a theory of practice. To admit that Luther suffered a crisis of meaning would mean that there has been more than one meaning in history, that perhaps indeed there is more than one meaning at the present time. It would mean that the meaning of meaning cannot be visually identified, fixed for eternity like a sequence of typescript upon a page. It would mean, finally, that the meaning of meaning must be waited upon in history, and that the theorist's work must always remain incomplete.

CHAPTER IV

THEORY AS SOOTHSAYING

Soothsaying

A soothsayer, according to the Oxford Dictionary, is: "one who speaks the truth"; or, "one who claims or pretends to the power of foretelling future events."[1]   Charles Taylor bestows the soothsayer's mantle upon his hermeneutic theorist; by virtue of his Olympian perspective upon the text which is social life, the theorist is uniquely equipped to tell political society the truth about itself in the present, and to offer prescriptions for the future. (Fortunately, Taylor eschews the task of prediction, observing - presumably seriously - that "really to be able to predict the future would be to have explicated so clearly the human condition that one would already have pre-empted all cultural innovation and transformation." He adds that "this is hardly in the bounds of the possible.")[2]

The metaphor which sustains Taylor's tale of the theorist's special power, a metaphor which recurs again and again in his writings, is that of the theorist as clairvoyant. Practices may be considered superior if they are actuated by "a higher, more clairvoyant, more serene motivation"; the theorist is one who knows how to draw a "moral map" which will distinguish such practices from baser ones.[3] People turn to political theory "because they feel the need to get clearer what society's practices involve"; and good theory "enables practice to

become less stumbling and more clairvoyant."[4]   Clairvoyance is the only justification, in the final analysis, for theory's prescriptive role: "What we need to explain is people living their lives; the terms in which they cannot avoid living them cannot be removed from the explanandum, <u>unless</u> [emphasis mine] we can propose other terms in which they could live them more clairvoyantly."[5]

A clairvoyant is a person of exceptional, perhaps supernatural insight, who inwardly sees that which is hidden to others. Taylor's use of the metaphor of clairvoyance invokes the spirit of Plato's <u>Symposium</u>, of Diotima's invitation to Socrates to turn his eyes toward the open sea of truth and beauty. We have already seen that Taylor believes that the articulation of human practices in language enables the theorist to grasp the contour of social reality, to get a "proper view" of it. This capacity, however, entails more than pure contemplative delight.   The special insight of the theorist makes special demands upon him; it is his responsibility to clear up confused interpretations, both intra-culturally and cross-culturally, and to offer "more clairvoyant" ones in their stead.

Taylor's article "Social Theory as Practice," included in the second volume of his <u>Philosophical Papers</u> is perhaps, of all his writings, most deeply imbued with optimism about the possibility of a theory of practice. It also provides the most forceful statement of the theorist's moral burden, which Taylor explains in the following passage:

> ... in fact the framing of theory rarely
> consists simply of making some continuing
> practice explicit.   The stronger motive for
> making and adapting theories is the sense that

> our implicit understanding is in some way
> crucially inadequate or even wrong. Theories
> do not just make our constitutive self-
> understandings explicit, but extend, or
> criticize or even challenge them. It is in
> this sense that theory makes a claim to tell
> us what is really going on, to show us the
> real, hitherto unidentified course of events.[6]

How strikingly different this is from the theoretical sensibility of Ludwig Wittgenstein, who writes that "the solution of philosophical problems can be compared with a gift in a fairy tale: in the magic castle it appears enchanted and if you look at it outside in daylight it is nothing but an ordinary bit of iron (or something of the sort)."[7] The theoretical dialectic is operating precisely in reverse; whereas Wittgenstein takes us from the realm of a rare experience into the world of the commonplace and the public, Taylor draws us aside from the common world to initiate us into a new and rare experience, a new way of seeing.

Throughout "Social Theory as Practice," the employment of visual metaphors is sustained and emphatic. The essay itself is described as an attempt to "gain clarity about the practice of theory," and to "throw light" upon the question of the validation of social theory.[8] Turning to the analysis itself, Taylor begins by stating that theory is a peculiar kind of education which sets out to remedy a peculiar blindness, the blindness of members of a political community with respect to the moral context within which they operate.[9] This is a process which requires that practice be put on display, that it be made visible; "what makes a theory right is that it brings practice out into the clear."[10] The theorist acts as a map-maker, charting the "terrain of possible

practices," in order to "give the shape and slope of the heights of value."[11] A good theory, a good "map of practice" will represent more accurately the way things are, enabling us to negotiate the terrain with greater ease; good theory enables us to see our way. It enables us to overcome the "muddle, confusion, and cross purposes" which hinder us, and hence enables "practice to become less stumbling and more clairvoyant."[12]

Once again, Taylor's text is rich in Platonic resonances. The theorist, the man of insight, is like Plato's philosophers, who, having seen the good, return to the Cave in which their fellows dwell. The theorist turns his gaze toward the terrain of possible practices in order to clear up confusion and illusion, just as Plato's "best natures" amongst the citizenry, having "reached the heights and taken an adequate view," return to the darkness to confront idolatry with "the reality of the beautiful, the just, and the good."[13] Taylor's map imagery conveys his conviction that theory can offer a comprehensive account of practice, and, as we have already seen, he believes that such an account can be "objectively validated"; therefore, the final step to be taken is to give theory its way with practice, to let it guide our decisions about the cultivation, modification, or abandonment of existing modes of life.[14]

Taylor has embarked, from time to time, on forays into the darkness, abandoning the methodological high ground in order to offer substantive accounts of "what is really going on." In his programmatic "tract for the times" entitled (revealingly) The Pattern of Politics,

Taylor outlines his ideological objectives for Canadian society. The
book, a model of self-assurance, sketches two "incompatible" images of
politics, "the politics of consensus" and the "politics of
polarization."[15]

The possibility of a politics of consensus is described as an
"illusion," and as a "genuine obstacle to real progress."[16] Proponents
of this sort of politics are saddled with some extremely unflattering
metaphors; to them, politics is a "game," a "mill," and a "machine."[17]
Although there are all sorts of material reasons for rejecting this
model - it distributes resources inequitably and concentrates power in
the hands of a small, cynical, elite - the really bad thing about the
consensus view is that it distorts political actors' consciousness; it
impairs their view of themselves and others. Taylor's discussion, at
this point, takes on a quasi-Hegelian aura; the politics of consensus,
he maintains, impedes the moral or spiritual development of the
community, because it seeks to have "politics revolve around negotiable
differences of interest rather than confrontation between deeply felt
principles."[18] The politics of consensus is implicated in an "atrophy
of meaning," as it frustrates the "universal human aspiration" for
identity within community.[19]

The politics of polarization, on the other hand - the politics of
the future - offers a clear view of the social situation that
consensualism obscures. It is a politics that seeks to reform the
public consciousness:

> To the politics of polarization, anything that
> presents itself as the consensus policy must
> be specious .... if any policy is accepted on
> its face value as being the result of
> consensus, this can only be because one or
> another group is being "taken in," or is
> unaware what the policy alternatives really
> are. It is most unlikely that those who enjoy
> power and privilege in a society will be
> duped, so consensus politics hinge on the
> relative ignorance or mystification of those
> in society who are most disadvantaged by it.[20]

Taylor's solution to this problem is the creation of a "dialogue society." At present, "our society is terribly opaque"; "the processes that really determine the conditions of life are visible only at the moment of impact."[21] The dialogue society would remedy this state of affairs by bringing dialogue out into the open, thereby reviving public discourse, "the only art-form in which a new classicism is possible — that is, an ordered expression of the whole."[22] The dialogue would remove the "screen" which hides society's need for democratization, and "increase people's grasp of their real predicament." Ultimately, this new society would transform the urban environment into an expressive organ of communication, involving the citizenry in "real participation in the search for common meanings" until the polity becomes "transparent."[23] Taylor concludes his polemic by summarizing the goals of the new politics, and inquiring whether they can yield "an idea powerful enough to bridge the gulfs that history, language, and distance have made out of the natural diversity of our people."[24]

From beginning to end, Taylor's "reading" of the Canadian political situation is a pure exaltation of the position of the spectator-theorist, who surveys the terrain of practice, as it were, from above;

discriminates the two "visions" of political life which coexist on the plane of the social text-analogue; separates illusion from reality; and proceeds to explain how even greater clarity, a "new classicism," can be attained, if only people have the courage to amend their practices. A more thorough and perfect example of the metaphor of theorist as semi-divine editor could hardly be imagined. What is perhaps most astounding about the book is its conclusion, which, in its perfect homage to Plato and to Hegel, invokes the parousia of a "powerful idea" to bridge the gulfs opened up by history, language, and distance. The emergence of such an idea would be a dazzling triumph for the powers of articulation, in a pluralistic era when all other bridges seem to have been broken, except, perhaps, "the rainbow-bridges of concepts."[25]

Taylor also believes his hermeneutical theory capable of offering definitive interpretations of the practices of other societies. In his article, "Understanding and Ethnocentricity," he argues strongly that hermeneutic theory is justified in aspiring to a non-ethnocentric understanding of other cultures, which can furthermore prompt fruitful comparison with our own. Once again, articulation is the key: understanding is to be gained by means of an appropriation of indigenous self-interpretations.[26]

The understanding of other cultures is a special case, as it involves interpreting the self-understandings of agents against a different background of practices than that to which we are accustomed. Taylor gives the hermeneutic method a special dialectical twist in this

instance, which he terms the employment of a "language of perspicuous contrast":

> This would be a language in which we could
> formulate both their way of life and ours as
> alternative possibilities in relation to some
> human constants at work in both. It would be a
> language in which the possible human
> variations would be so formulated that both
> our form of life and theirs could be
> perspicuously described as alternative such
> variations. Such a language of contrast might
> show their language of understanding to be
> distorted or inadequate in some respects, or
> it might show ours to be so (in which case, we
> might find that understanding then leads to an
> alteration of our self-understanding, and
> hence our form of life - a far from unknown
> process in history); or it might show both to
> be so.[27]

The language of perspicuous contrast, then, furnishes the interpreter with a meta-language, a sort of Hegelian Aufhebung which transforms the moral and practical terms of reference. (While this definitely seems to be Taylor's view of the matter, I cannot pretend to be able to describe the process of transformation itself; Taylor is quite vague on this point.) While he seems willing to entertain a weak incommensurability thesis, referring to incommensurable terms as those which have "no exact [emphasis mine] translation in other languages," it is clear that the language of perspicuous contrast is intended to overcome any difficulties in translation.[28] Ultimately, an authoritative interpretation is attainable by hermeneutic means.

Taylor argues that the hermeneutic understanding of other cultures, although it may involve empathy, does not rely upon it, for hermeneutics is a science; "science is a form of discourse," he adds, in an austere

tone, "and what we want is an account which sets out the significance of action and situation."[29]   Second, against Peter Winch, Taylor asserts that it is unnecessary, in fact misguided, to adopt the agent's point of view in the attempt to understand him; the theorist's explanation must, in any event, surpass the agent's self-definition. The agent's self-descriptions must be understood, but, "in the normal case what is demanded of a theoretical account is that it make the agent's doings clearer than they were to him."[30]

All of this leads up to Taylor's most substantial claim, that hermeneutic theory can offer inter-subjectively valid criticisms of other cultures. The hermeneutic method develops a new language:

> ... which enables us to give an account of the
> procedures of both societies in terms of the
> same cluster of possibilities .... It allows
> for the fact that the range of their
> activities may be crucially different from
> ours, that they may have activities which have
> no correspondent in ours .... But unlike the
> incorrigibility view, it does not just accept
> that their particular activities will be
> incommensurable with ours .... We avoid
> criticizing them on irrelevant grounds ....
> But we can criticize them.[31]

In short, hermeneutic theory equips its practitioners to make "valid transcultural judgements of superiority."[32] Although Taylor does temperately forbear from making any judgements with respect to global superiority, a comparative conceptual account is held to be quite manageable on a case-by-case basis. Thus, he maintains that, without being in the least ethnocentric, one can state that certain "primitive," pre- or atheoretical cultures are simply less rational than Western, theoretical society. Western cultures simply have demonstrated that

they are better able to articulate the significance of the interplay
between the forces of nature and the actions of man in a "perspicuous
manner"; a particular and inescapable proof of this rationality is the
tremendous sophistication of the West's technological inventory.[33]

His account of cross-cultural adjudication complete, Taylor's
hermeneutic method has come full circle, validating its own rationality.
In its sweeping comprehensiveness, analytic penetration, and legislative
power, Charles Taylor's proposed science of hermeneutics is a
tantalizing simulacrum of theory's ancient dream: a theory of practice.

Critique: On the Contest of Interpretations

Taylor's choice of a visual metaphor for theory is a fateful one.
By rejecting Wittgenstein's "indistinct picture" in favour of a clear
one, by rejecting ambiguity in favour of clarity, he makes theory into
a species of cognition (which, traditionally conceived in visual terms,
is a kind of immediate perceptual knowing):

> Cognition ... [unlike thought], belongs to
> all, and not only to intellectual or artistic
> work processes; like fabrication itself, it is
> a process with a beginning and end, whose
> usefulness can be tested, and which, if it
> produces no results, has failed like a
> carpenter's workmanship has failed when he
> fabricates a two-legged table.[34]

Theory is open to all in that its interpretations are perspicuous
or transparent; if the truth is not obscured by false or mystifying
practices, it is "out in the clear," open for all to see. Theory is not
a matter of adopting someone else's point of view in order to understand

him, nor of "describing and accounting for what he does in his own terms, or those of his society and time."[35]   Good theory is susceptible of objective validation; it is not just empathy, identifying with another - it must go beyond him, seeing him against a background of objectified practice.   Taylor would almost certainly agree with Alexander Rosenberg, when he says:

> Surely, it cannot be merely a matter of taste whether improvable generalizations or empathetic insights into intelligibility is the aim of a good social scientist's research program. What the social scientist will count as good evidence for a theory or explanation advanced in the pursuit of inquiry cannot be merely a matter of taste.[36]

Taylor's suppression of the ambiguity and complexity of discourse is tantamount to the rejection of the idea that good theory is an exercise of judgement.   For acts of judgement are our most typical response to problems characterized by their ambiguity, most notably in the case of aesthetic matters, matters of taste.

Michael Polanyi identifies the use of language as one such art, which depends upon the exercise of skill.   The use of language, he suggests, is regulated by the Laws of Poverty, Consistency, and Manageability. Language is, first of all, necessarily poor, both for mnemonic reasons and because "the meaning of a word is formed and manifested by repeated usage ... it follows that a language must be poor enough to allow the same words to be used a sufficient number of times."[37] Secondly, in order that repeated uses of a word may become meaningful, it is necessary that language exhibit a certain consistency of application.   The nature of this consistency is, however, quite

problematic, for it stylizes the world. "Since the world," writes
Polanyi, "like a kaleidoscope, never exactly repeats any previous
situation (and indeed, if it did we would not know it, as we would have
no means of telling that time had passed in between), we can achieve
consistency only by identifying manifestly different situations in
respect to some particular feature, and this requires a series of
personal judgements."[38] Finally, language must be manageable in the
economies of its material deployment, because it "can assist thought
only to the extent to which its symbols can be reproduced, stored up,
transported, re-arranged, and thus more easily pondered, than the things
which they denote."[39]

   As language is structurally simple (or poor), imperfectly
consistent, and susceptible of multiple re-arrangements or
recombinations as the situation demands, it is hardly the terrain of
certainty or objectivity. Even simple definition, the assertion of
denotation that often seems to us to be a simple verbalization of a
cognition, "is an art, and whatever we say about things assumes our
endorsement of our own skill in practising this art."[40] Vorsicht, the
beginnings of articulate understanding, always already exists within the
practical complex of Vorhabe, our pre- and semi-articulate orientation
towards things:

> In interpreting, we do not, so to speak, throw
> a 'signification' over some naked thing which
> is present-at-hand, we do not stick a value on
> it; but when something within-the-world is
> encountered as such, the thing in question
> already has an involvement which is disclosed
> in our understanding of the world, and this
> involvement is one which gets laid out by the

> interpretation .... In every case this
> interpretation is grounded in something we
> have in advance - a fore-having. As the
> appropriation of understanding, the
> interpretation operates in Being towards a
> totality of involvements which is already
> understood - a Being which understands.[41]

The indeterminacy and poverty of language in the midst of the plenitude of Being - this is the existential paradox which gives rise to the sensibility which regards theory as a kind of judgement, even a judgement of taste. The variability of the practices, the involvements which condition understanding, is the factor which makes "the establishment of truth ... decisively dependent upon a set of personal criteria of our own which cannot be formally defined."[42] If a theory of practice were possible, it would formalize the tacit orientation to the world which is the medium in which explicit commitments about the world are sustained, "convert all arts into mathematically prescribed operations, and thus destroy them as works of art."[43] The feeling that such an exhaustive formalization of experience is structurally improbable and programmatically undesirable animates those meta-theories which conceive theory as a kind of judgement.

From Aristotle to Arendt, theories which have accorded judgement a significant place in discourse about politics have varied considerably in their substantive accounts of the operation of judgement. Nonetheless, these theories share several common preoccupations: the attenuation of the conceptual in favour of a close attention to the significance of the particular; the exercise of the imagination in the creation and apprehension of meaning; and the plurality of participants in the activity of judging.

Kant's aesthetic theory is an interesting test case in this regard, because, when confronted with the significance of the work of art, he gives an account of a judgement so different from that which he describes in his moral theory. The latter is supremely conceptual; rules of practical reason are deduced from universal norms of rationality. For Kant, morality as such is the object of, is indeed defined by, a "generally valid theory"; "ultimately, to Kant, the categorical imperative is valid because ... [one] cannot deny it without falling into self-contradiction."[44]

In the realm of the aesthetic, however, Kant is impelled to a retreat from the cognitive, a "withdrawl of the beautiful from simple objectivity."[45] The conceptual is deprived of its primacy. Kant writes that "the judgement of taste is an aesthetic judgement, i.e. one resting on subjective grounds," and that "no concept can be its determining ground ...."[46] While Kant's aesthetics aspires to an ultimate universality, it is a universality that is objectively groundless. The experiences or "aesthetic ideas" to which contemplation of the beautiful gives rise cannot be mapped out in language, for an aesthetic idea is "that representation of the imagination which induces much thought, yet without the possibility of any definite thought whatever, i.e. concept, being adequate to it, and which language, consequently, can never get quite on level terms with or render completely intelligible."[47]

Kant seeks to restrict the operation of the judgement of taste to an autonomous aesthetic realm, leaving his conceptualist theories of pure reason in science and pure practical reason in morality

untouched.[48] It is by no means clear that he accomplishes this neat
division, however. The judgement of taste, or judgement without
concepts, is the centrepiece of an aesthetics that is meant to serve as
a mediating link between pure reason, operating in the realm of natural
determination, and practical reason, which orders human activity in the
realm of freedom, thereby effecting "a transition from the sensible to
the intelligible world."[49] Our experience in the appreciation of works
of art helps to give us a sense of the "purposiveness of nature," which,
although completely subjective and self-referring, is nonetheless
necessary in order that we may look upon the natural world as if it were
a coherent whole.[50] Similarly, although perhaps somewhat more
mysteriously, aesthetic experience furthers our comprehension of moral
and political life, because "the beautiful is a symbol of the moral
good"; initiation in aesthetic judgement trains us to "appraise the
worth of others on the score of a like maxim of their judgement."[51]

     As anyone will know who has read Wilde's The Picture of Dorian
Gray, the connection between beauty and the morally good is a tenuous
one, at best, and when the aesthetic sensibility is most disinterested -
as Kant thought it ought to be - "vice and virtue are to the artist
materials for an art."[52] Nonetheless, what is significant is that Kant,
for all his love of rules and rationalities, allows that the
conceptually poor judgements that attend aesthetic experience give us an
intimation of the coherence of nature and the meanings of human
activity. It is an admission which imperils the incipient theory of
practice implicit in the Critique of Practical Reason, wherein analysis

of human action must "begin with principles and proceed to concepts, and only then, if possible, go on to the senses ....."[53] Even by suggesting an analogy linking the judgements of morality with the judgements òf taste, Kant threatens the status of the former as a systematic "code of laws applying to our actions which can be derived completely a priori from principles."[54] By making the analogy, Kant opens the door to the possibility that practical reason is bound to the sensuous particularities of human existence, which language can never render completely intelligible.

After Kant, the attenuation of the conceptual in the act of judgement proceeds apace. According to Hannah Arendt, the whole function of thinking is to disorder the conceptual, as evidenced in Socrates' use of the metaphor of wind to explain thought:

> It is in this invisible element's nature to
> undo, unfreeze, as it were, what language, the
> medium of thinking, has frozen into thought -
> words (concepts, sentences, definitions,
> doctrines) whose "weakness" and inflexibility
> Plato denounces so splendidly in the Seventh
> Letter. The consequence is that thinking
> inevitably has a destructive, undermining
> effect on all established criteria, values,
> measurements of good and evil, in short, on
> all those customs and rules of conduct we
> treat of in morals and ethics.[55]

So conceived, thinking leaves little trace of the objective, the visible; thinking startles its practitioners into the recognition that "[one has] nothing in [one's] grasp but perplexities, and the best we can do with them is share them with each other."[56] Thinking, in effect, is a purificatory exercise which cleanses the mind of concepts in preparation for the act of judgement; "what we generally call

'thinking,'" writes Arendt, "though unable to move the will or provide judgement with general rules, must prepare the particulars given to the senses in such a way that the mind is able to handle them in their absence ...."[57]

Thinking disorders and dispels prior conceptual certainties unendingly, with the result that one must pay heed to the contingency, the novelty, the particularity of events; that is, each time one is confronted with "some difficulty in life," one must "make up one's mind anew."[58] This "making up one's mind" is the act of judgement, which, following from Kant's account of judgements of taste, Arendt presents as exclusively concerned with particulars; as such, each judgement will involve a new (or renewed) commitment, which will make reference neither to description in terms of a general concept, nor to explanation in terms of a general cause.

A theory which conceives itself as making judgements akin to judgements of taste will, therefore, strive for an attentiveness to the particular, just as we cultivate attentiveness when we are presented with a work of art, which somehow "arrests us and compels us to dwell upon the individual appearance itself."[60] It will be a theory which asks, "What is the importance and significance of this particular experience which claims truth for itself, thereby denying that the universal expressed by the mathematical formulation of the laws of nature is the only kind of truth?"[61] It will recall Aristotle's dictum that politics requires a kind of practical wisdom (phronesis) which

concerns itself with the variable and particular, "for it is practical, and practice is concerned with particulars."[62]

Moreover, theory which considers its task to be akin to the discourse of aesthetic judgement, although it may strive for clarity, will not always attain it:

> ... the artistic process that tries to give form to disorder, amorphousness, and dissociation is nothing but the effort of a reason that wants to lend a discursive clarity to things. When its discourse is unclear, it is because things themselves and our relationship to them, are still very unclear - indeed, so unclear that it would be ridiculous to pretend to define them from the uncontaminated podium of rhetoric. It would be only another way of escaping reality .... [63]

Charles Taylor's political theory, by contrast, rejects the idea that an account of politics should ever be unclear. His rhetoric of clairvoyance demands a panoramic mapping of the terrain of practice, and a concomitant subsumption of practical differences under increasingly general concepts. This is the whole thrust of the idea of a "language of perspicuous contrast," which purports to provide a new discursive structure within which to compare (previously) incommensurable practices. The dialectic of contrastive evaluation is able to redeem, for a term like "rationality" or "freedom," a trans-cultural, trans-historical meaning which is not ahistorical, strictly speaking, but which stands at the summit of history.

When practice does seem fraught with ambiguity, Taylor seeks its resolution into competing theoretical perspectives which, once identified, might present the theorist with a clear choice in the

matter. Thus, he describes contemporary legal theory as a confused "muddle" resulting from the conflation of two essentially incompatible meta-ethics: an Aristotelian theory which prizes the cultivation of certain prescribed virtues in the political commonwealth, and an atomistic theory which values individual satisfaction above all else. The proper goal of theory in this instance, he maintains, is to disentangle the former (rich and suggestive) theory from the latter (impoverished and misleading) one, in order that "the modern ideals of freedom and reason can be rescued from the illusory meta-ethic and the blindness to the diversity of goods which have accompanied them."[64]

The problem, of course, lies in the difficulty of establishing a stable meaning for terms like "freedom" and "reason", which, in addition to being internally complex, are subject to adaptation as communities "change the rules of language to fit new occasions."[65] The meanings of such terms are not historically stable, but rather assume a protean variety in the changing matrices of practice; to give them a denotation is to make a judgement in some particular context:

> ... to speak of "justice," "truth," "courage,"
> etc. is but a performance based on our
> understanding of the subject matter of those
> terms. Only if we are confident that we can
> identify what is just, true, or courageous,
> can we reasonably undertake to analyze our own
> practice of applying the terms "justice,"
> "truth" or "courage," and hope that such an
> analysis will reveal to us more clearly what
> is just, true, or courageous.[66]

Thus it is that theory must take care to make fine discriminations when it considers the concepts which comprise its historical inventory. Especially as theory reflects upon its own history, questions of

tonality and timbre become exceedingly complex.   The persistence of the theoretical "statement," a term coined by Michel Foucault to allude to serious speech acts which are, in effect, the terms of art circulated by a given discipline, is inherently problematic:

> ... this identity of the statement ... is
> itself relative and oscillates according to
> the use that is made of the statement and the
> way in which it is handled .... at a certain
> scale of macro-history, one may consider that
> an affirmation like "species evolve" forms the
> same statement in Darwin and in Simpson; at a
> finer level, and considering more limited
> fields of use (neo-Darwinism as opposed to the
> Darwinian system itself), we are presented
> with two different statements.   The constancy
> of the statement, the preservation of its
> identity through the unique events of the
> enunciations, its duplications through the
> identity of forms, constitute the function of
> the field of use in which it is placed.[67]

Interpretation in such circumstances demands a close attention to the particular, which is not always demanded by our relation to the visual phenomenon. Indeed, Gadamer encourages the cultivation of aural metaphors for interpretation as a means of solving some of the philosophical problems that we have set for ourselves; the transitory arts of drama, music, and poetry compel a close attention to their dynamics, moment by moment.[68]   These arts cultivate a sense of rhythm, of regularity which is always different, of the "autonomous temporality of the work of art."[69] They instil a sense of the interplay of identity and difference in the flux of time, which is the skill most indispensable for interpretation.

Judgements of taste are not merely reportorial; they do not simply give accounts of particulars presented to the perception as objects. On

the contrary, "all art of whatever kind, whether the art of a substantial tradition with which we are familiar or the contemporary art that is unfamiliar because it has no tradition, always demands constructive activity on our part."[70] This is just as true of the visual arts as of any other, incidentally; as Ernst Gombrich reminds us, there is no "innocent eye." The notion that there could be such an "innocent eye," a kind of seeing "uncontaminated by imagination, purpose, or desire," is "a metaphor for a highly experienced and cultivated sort of vision."[71] To make sense of a Cubist painting, for example, requires that we "make an active contribution of our own and make an effort to synthesize the outlines of the various planes as they appear on the canvas."[72]

Kant's celebrated definition of aesthetic judgement as the free play of understanding and imagination goes to the heart of the matter.[73] The understanding (not to be confused with the same term in hermeneutic theory) serves to "subsume sense impressions under concepts, thereby converting the given manifold into objects ...."[74] The imagination provides raw materials for the understanding's discursive operations; "imagination, therefore, which transforms a visible object into an invisible image, fit to be stored in the mind, is the condition sine qua non for providing the mind with suitable thought-objects ...."[75] In their quotidian operation, imagination and understanding work together simply to assure that experience's chaotic mass of sensations is ordered into a coherent perception of things.[76]

In aesthetic judgement, however, imagination emerges as the dominant partner. The conceptual is shunted aside as the imagination re-presents the images of experience in an act of mnemonic apprehension, and then, in the process of "free play," reconfigures its apprehensions; it becomes "productive," rearranging elements from the "visible world."[77] The imagination is therefore best defined as a productive, constructive activity:

> The imagination (as a productive faculty of cognition) is a powerful agent for creating, as it were, a second nature out of the material supplied to it by actual nature. It affords us entertainment where experience proves too commonplace; and we even use it to remodel experience .... By this means we get a sense of our freedom from the law of association (which attaches to the empirical employment of the imagination), with the result that the material can be borrowed by us from nature in accordance with that law, but worked up by us into something else - namely, what surpasses nature.[78]

In this striking passage Kant presents the imagination as having a constitutive role in aesthetic judgement; indeed, aesthetic judgement is none other than an act of imagination. The "judgement in the judgement of taste [is] assimilated to imagination, displaced by imagination, transformed into an operation of imagination."[79] Whereas judgement in the moral sense, as set forth by Kant, is the subsumption of particulars under universals, aesthetic judgement is an agency of transcendence which transgresses the bounds of the conceptual, re-forming the phenomena it recalls to memory.[80]

It is the imaginative nature of judgement in the Third Critique that enables Foucault to name Kant as the forebear of two distinct ways

of doing theory: on the one hand, an "analytics of truth," which seeks the possibility of true knowledge in certain universal or transcendental conditions of knowing, but on the other an "ontology of the present" concerned with the imaginative and discursive constitution of the "present field of possible experiences."[81] Such an ontology of the present recognizes the role of the constitutive imagination in creating and apprehending the present; it makes of theory a process of judgement which apprehends "particular transcendentals" in history. That is, while acknowledging the force of political meta-narratives to shape every aspect of life, it seeks to relate to them as particulars, whose claim upon us is in the nature of a creative appeal rather than a binding truth. An ontology of the present seeks a description of events which avoids their subsumption under too-general concepts, or their explanation in terms of too-general causes. As Paul Veyne writes, "Eternal realities - government, domination, Power, the State - cannot explain the haze of detailed events. Such noble draperies are nothing but rationalist abstractions laid over programs whose diversity is secretly enormous."[82]

Herein lies the horror which Rosenberg expresses against the idea of theory as being merely a matter of taste. For there is no escaping the conclusion that, if theory is construed as an exercise of judgement akin to the judgement of taste, the diversity of its redescriptions, its misreadings of the political, will be enormous. A theory which conceives itself as judging aesthetically will, quite "naturally" (conventionally) ascribe to its subject matter the status of a work of

art.   Its   judging   will   consequently   seek   out,   and   <u>constitute</u>
particularities in a way that may, at times, prove exhausting.   Northrop
Frye writes that it is unlikely that the "great poem of earth" will ever
be written,   "because   a   poem   of earth   would be   an   endless   narrative
....."[83]   But a meta-theory of politics   which conceives political theory
to   be an   exercise   of   aesthetic   judgement   constitutes   its   object,
politics, as this great, forlorn poem.   Such a theory acknowledges that
"the city – <u>polis</u>   – in its sheer   inability to complete   itself, is the
embodiment of the uncompletable fecundity of human story-making."[84]

Charles   Taylor's   hermeneutics   has   little   to   say   about   the
productive   imagination   in   the   constitution   and   interpretation   of
political meaning,   beyond his   assertion that   our self-interpretations
are constitutive of   feeling.   His theory   is quite squarely   opposed to
any suggestion   that   political   meaning   is an   imaginative   construct,
inasmuch as such a suggestion would serve   to de-stabilize and pluralize
meaning,   or   to   threaten   the   attainment   of "objective   validity"   in
interpretation.   Moreover,   like   psychoanalysis,   Taylor's   is   a
"hermeneutics   of   suspicion,"   which   seeks   to   bring   incorrect
interpretation to light.   The theorist, as clairvoyant, is charged with
the responsibility   of   looking through   the   opacity of agents'   self-
misunderstandings   and   diagnosing them,   and   then   prescribing   more
salutary   interpretations.   Praising   the   psychoanalytic   model,   and
appropriating its terminology, Taylor argues that the only way to combat
misinterpretation is "by uncovering these distortions that we project in
virtue of the fact that the whole way we put our lives together is bound

up with them."[85]   There is, he says, "no historical understanding
without self-understanding."[86]

    That Taylor's theorist uncovers distorted perceptions entails that
he has access to proper ones; like the psychoanalyst, he strives to
uncover a deep truth about the subject and, in this instance, society as
well. A search for truth, conducted along these lines, has no place in
aesthetic discourse, strictly speaking; as Arendt notes, in The Critique
of Judgement the word "truth" does not occur.[87]   To seek to compel
aesthetic agreement by means of an appeal to truth would be an act of
conceptual heteronomy, a cognitivist coercion, as it were.

    Not only is Taylor suspicious of actors' self-interpretations,
professing that they are often distortions in need of correction; he
also fails to evince much concern for the fragility of political
meanings. For shared political meaning, thought of as a work of art,
may be vulnerable to dissolution in the process of explication, just as
a joke which is thoroughly explained becomes a dry, humourless bit of
pedantry, in short, no longer a joke. For a key characteristic of all
aesthetic phenomena is the inseparability of their form and content;
they do not merely convey experiences, but are experiences,
intrinsically. Freud himself points out that a joke is "a judgement
which produces a comic contrast," whose essence is its form, alterations
to which may cause "the disappearance of the joke"; in some cases its
meaning hinges on the placement of a single letter.[88]

    The problem of the dissolution of shared meaning by way of its
explication is a particularly profound illustration of the problem of

paraphrase. Altering Max Black's formulation of the latter somewhat, we might wish to say that paraphrase invariably says too little, and with the wrong emphasis. As a conceptual operation, a metonymic attempt to unravel metaphor, paraphrase inevitably must offer a selective account of its subject, and so it is with the hermeneutic explanation of practice that Taylor proposes. The threat to meaning inheres in the explanation's inability to activate important aspects of the relevant practice's experiential import, for reasons having to do with the maintenance of consistency and lucidity which we rightly demand of explanation as a stylistic matter.

So, for example, a political scientist may give an account of the functioning of political conventions as a means of selecting political candidates, and a party, committing itself to the terms of his analysis, may do everything in its power to advance this goal, to make the selection process quicker, more efficient, and more democratic - perhaps, as a result of this exercise, the party institutes a province-wide long-distance telephone ballot for all of its card-carrying members. In the end, the party may be disappointed to find that they have inaugurated a leadership process (and a leader) of interest to no one, because the old, inefficient, undemocratic process was a more exciting one, albeit one redolent of "the tribal rites prescribed for warriors before battle."[89] Perhaps, as in the American presidential system, not even the element of suspense was necessary to arouse a public response, as long as there were a sufficient televised communication of mass enthusiasm.

The contemporary plight of the House of Windsor with respect to its subjects in the Commonwealth furnishes another example. For as long as the Royal Family were able to maintain a seldom-bridgeable gulf between themselves and the citizenry, their allure remained intact. Presently, however, their fortunes wane as the "serious" press offers up article after high-minded article treating the question of the qualities befitting someone occupying the position of the head of state, as if the monarch were an exceptionally well-compensated minor bureaucrat; these disquisitions have done more to foster republican sentiments than any breath of scandal, for they go to the question of instrumental institutional rationality, never a strong card for royalty. Such discourses imperil the existing institution because they provide a redescription which thinking, voting people can accept; nonetheless, the redescription may not exhaust the meaning of monarchy, for it reduces a symbolic, totemic status to an almost commercial function.

To take a final, more serious example, one might well consider the plight of Aboriginal peoples in North America, whose self-definitions were displaced by European culture by means of a redescription which amounted to a hostile takeover. Their practices were explicated to them in terms of an alien standard of rationality, which de-contextualized and transvalued their existing self-descriptions until only vestiges of their ethical, political, and spiritual discourse remained, vestiges which are only now being reclaimed.

Each of these three instances is an example of the phenomenon Max Weber termed "rationalization," and they serve to illustrate three

dangers inherent in Taylor's attempt to systematize accounts of practice: selectivity, irrelevance, and, most destructive of all, misunderstanding. They serve as crude reminders that "ideological principles are metonymic," selective interpretations of a whole which can never be made fully explicit. "Rationalization of belief," as a demand for a systematic account of practice," is the elimination of particular judgements which cannot be subsumed under a more general judgement."[91] Presumably Taylor would make no interpretive "errors" either so trivial or so momentous as the ones just mentioned; however, all we have to assure us is his assertion that a good hermeneutic theorist will be prepared to exercise "a certain measure of insight."[92] If, however, his metaphor of "mapping the terrain of practices" is a serious one, it is open to question whether the hermeneutic theorist's insight will be used to its best effect, for the metaphor suggests that he will be approaching the social text looking not for particulars, but for general conceptual contours.

Taylor's "hermeneutic science" is thus at variance with meta-theories which take aesthetic judgement as their central metaphor in two important respects: Taylor's theory is unlike an exercise of a judgement of taste in that it gives priority to the conceptual over the particular, as in his descriptions of "rationality" and "meaning," and in that it distrusts the exercise of imagination in the creation and interpretation of political meaning, preferring instead to describe the process as a species of direct cognition; the metaphor of interpretation as clairvoyant reading of text seems to demand no less. The final, most

serious divergence is Taylor's suppression of the idea that there is a plurality of actors in the political realm, and that there may consequently be a legitimate conflict of interpretations.

Hannah Arendt, in The Human Condition, describes plurality as the fundamental condition of political existence:

> Human plurality, the basic condition of both action and speech, has the twofold character of equality and distinction. If men were not equal, they could neither understand each other and those who came before them nor plan for the future and foresee the needs of those who will come after them. If men were not distinct, each human being distinguished from any other who is, was, or ever will be, they would need neither speech nor action to make themselves understood. Signs and sounds to communicate immediate, identical needs and wants would be enough.[93]

For Arendt, politics is a "being together" in a community which spaces common interests and individuals' quests for self-disclosure "in the form of the so-called agonal spirit, the passionate drive to show one's self in measuring up against others .... "[94] Despite the clash of "conflicting wills and intentions" in the political realm, from time to time its residents are able to act in concert, to begin something entirely new, whose consequences are boundless, and whose significance can be judged only in retrospect.[95] Her emphasis upon the importance of plurality as the sine qua non for politics echoes Aristotle's claim for phronesis, or practical wisdom, that it "has to do with action and deliberation," and therefore requires congress with a group of one's peers.[96]

Kant's aesthetic theory is the only aspect of his critical philosophy in which existent human beings are not subordinated to the heteronomy of concepts, for there are, as we have seen, no concepts at work in the judgement of taste. While Kant's aesthetics projects an ultimate universality of judgement, this universality is not objective; indeed, Kant depicts it as the fruit of persuasion. Kant explains that "a person who describes something as beautiful insists that every one ought to give the object in question his approval and follow suit in describing it as beautiful .... we are suitors for agreement from every one else ...."[97]

Arendt, Aristotle, and Kant, although their theories differ in other respects, all agree that the plurality of actors in the political realm is somehow irreducible. What are the consequences of this commitment? What are its lessons for political theory?

First, each theorist, in at least a limited sense (in Kant's case, a very limited, almost inadvertent sense), while allowing that the political life is lived in and through discursive practices, rejects the notion that such a life is either immured in, or exhausted by, discourse. This is why Aristotle maintains that, while young men may prove able geometers or mathematicians, "a young man of practical wisdom cannot be found."[98] "The cause," he notes, "is that such wisdom is concerned not only with universals but with particulars, which become familiar from experience .... "[99] Practical wisdom or phronesis thus has about it an element of skill or connoisseurship, which cannot entirely be formalized.

Political action, on Hannah Arendt's account, is intimately bound up with speech, without which there can be no disclosure of the agent's unique individuality. Speech alone, however, will not suffice; a certain social and political matrix is required to bring this prized state of affairs into being:

> This revelatory quality of speech and action
> comes to the fore where people are with others
> and neither for nor against them - that is, in
> sheer human togetherness .... Without the
> disclosure of the agent in the act, action
> loses its specific character and becomes one
> form of achievement among others .... This
> happens whenever human togetherness is lost,
> that is, when people are only for or against
> other people, as for instance in modern
> warfare .... In these instances, which of
> course have always existed, speech becomes
> indeed "mere talk," simply one more means
> toward the end 100

If one is willing to allow that Kant's notion of aesthetic judgement might be extended to politics - which was certainly never intended but is certainly possible nonetheless - here, too, there is a sense of the limits of language and the conceptual. When attempting to win universal approbation for our judgements of taste, Kant maintains, we must court our fellows like suitors; as no conceptual language can convey the experiences at hand, we must resort to an open-ended persuasive discourse to try to "bring them around." Thus, aesthetic contemplation issues in no infallible demonstrations, no binding prescriptions, and no conceptual ultimata.

On each of these three accounts, then, each recognized interlocutor is ascribed a certain rudimentary equality, which is in each case presented as the appropriate response to the relevant human capacities

acting upon the subject matter at hand. This concession admits of a situation which none of the three theorists would likely consider ideal, but which all would admit to be possible: a full-fledged contest of interpretations. Deliberation, from time to time, embraces disagreement; the agonistic impulse toward self-disclosure sometimes brings political projects into collision; and judgements of taste, empirically speaking, are notoriously variable. If theory is an exercise of judgement, given the limits of human communicative capacity, and the distinct needs of the parties to such communication, conflict seems inevitable. We live in the hope of reaching agreement - a deliberative conclusion, a concerted effort in some project, a shared apprehension of beauty - but such agreement is never a foregone conclusion.

The most disturbing aspect of Charles Taylor's proposed hermeneutic science is its apparent willingness to break recalcitrant interlocutors to the conceptual yoke, as it were. Taylor's certainty that the "terrain of possible practices" can be mapped; that the clarity of such a mapping should enable the theorist to bid those in thrall to illusion to "develop their intuitions and change themselves"; and that the development of a language of perspicuous contrast founds "valid transcultural judgements of superiority," presumes that language will bear crushingly heavy burdens in the service of his theoretical project. His Olympian perspective seems to de-individuate the human objects of his discourse, to deny them the status of full interlocutors who might

say something unexpected.   Ultimately, Taylor denies his political
actors their <u>wills</u>.

Can language provide such an unambiguous articulation of experience
as Taylor supposes? Michel Foucault cautions that:

> Discourses are not once and for all
> subservient to power or raised up against it,
> any more than silences are.   We must make
> allowance for the complex and unstable process
> whereby discourse can be both an instrument
> and an effect of power, but also a hindrance,
> a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a
> starting point for an opposing strategy.[101]

For Taylor, meaning has lost this vital, dynamic character, and
lies frozen in the typescript of the text-analogue, frozen in terms like
"freedom," "rationality," and "truth."   His political actors are not
actors but concept-bearers whose existence is determined by their
adoption of self-definitions which are, in turn, the distillates of
certain meta-theoretical narratives like "atomism" and "expressivism."
The only meaningful distinction to be made is between those who
subscribe to correct theoretical viewpoints and those who adhere to
false, self-defeating ones.

This is the crux of the problem: because Taylor conceives of
politics as a "text-analogue," as a flat, static, two-dimensional visual
field which can be "mapped," he has difficulty in giving an account of
political activities which are more in the nature of temporal acts
directed toward particulars. Such activities cannot easily be described
in terms of a visual metaphor because they involve a thinking through of
complex, shifting, evanescent perceptions unique to the situation in
question; a resolution of this complexity by means of personal

judgements of significance; and an ultimate transcendence of complexity
by means of willful commitments which issue from judgement, but which go
beyond it and hence surpass description. This surpassing of description
is unacceptable to Taylor's hermeneutics, which sees knowledge as
seeing; to know is to have an immediate cognitive access to things,
which, optimally, involves resolving a field of significance into
patterns of meaning. In the most complex scenario, such knowing will
have to struggle with a situation of "cognitive polarization," a classic
gestalt "rabbit-duck" situation, in which the theorist must struggle to
determine which perception best organizes the particulars to be
described: positive or negative freedom, communitarianism or atomism,
the politics of polarization or the politics of consensus.[102] A
disordered state of knowledge is characterized by the opacity of its
self-descriptions; lack of knowledge is simply blindness.

Theory, then, must merely make sense of what is already there, the
meaning immanent in the text-analogue, distributed in the typescript of
its pages. Such a theory finds it difficult, however, to look up from
the page. It seeks meaning as a stable, articulated whole, and is
disconcerted by the active, imaginative constitution of meaning in the
process of judgement, and by the willing embrace of new particulars
which issues from this judgement.

Charles Taylor's political theory lacks a certain aesthetic common
sense. What it gains in representational clarity, it loses in relevance
and force. Like so much theory inspired by visual metaphor, his
prospective theory of practice lacks a convincing psychology or

phenomenology of psychic experience, for psychology depends upon a sense of internality which is foreign to the objectifying spirit of the visual.[103]

Taylor's interpretive priorities therefore seem reversed. Seeking to legislate for practice, and indeed to transform it, he chooses the articulate concept as the medium of transformation. By clearing up conceptual and meta-theoretical "muddle," he hopes to help society bind up its wounds, and be healed. But such conceptual repair is the one activity that is least likely to change practice; the "rainbow bridge of concepts" is lofty, luminous, and beautiful to behold, but it is a long way removed from the economic, social, and political practices Taylor wishes to see altered. For, as Cardinal Newman observes in his Grammar of Assent, the likelihood of our doing is intimately bound up with the manner of our knowing, and, as our knowing in most practical matters is a question of imaginatively apprehending particulars (after the pattern of Aristotle's phronesis), we are more likely to be moved by propositions which address the imagination in the guise of the concrete and the particular; whereas the concrete and the particular experience may win a "real assent" leading to action, the conceptual commands mere "notional assent," feeble and faint by comparison.[104]

Rather than a conceptual re-ordering, a re-structured meta-narrative, transformation of practice requires the inspiration afforded by the sensuous particular, the influence of "stabilizing and focusing events which one might call cultural paradigms."[105] In other words, following Michael Polanyi, the transformation of skilled practices

requires a kind of demonstration, a teaching by example mediated by the symbol; so, for example, when Gandhi wanted people to think about self-reliance, he taught them to spin. Heidegger points to the Greek Temple, the Hebrew Covenant, the luminous deeds of Pericles, and the thoughtful words of Parmenides as further instances of potentially transforming cultural paradigms.[106]   Truth for a given society always takes up residence in the particular and the tangible:

> The openness of this Open, that is, truth, can
> be what it is, namely, this openness, only if
> and as long as it establishes itself within
> its Open. Hence there must always be some
> being in this Open, something that is, in
> which the openness takes its stand and attains
> its constancy.[107]

All of the examples we have cited are bearers not merely of a discursive, but also of an existential truth, which can never be fully unravelled or exhausted in language. Moreover, as symbols, they attain both a certain openness and a certain constancy, impressing themselves upon the imagination and inviting an indeterminate range of responses in the way of reflection, appreciation, and   action; they prompt an aesthetic as well as a cognitive response.   Therefore, they are able to inspire what Newman called a "real assent" to their status as bearers of truths, an assent which is likely to have an impact upon practice; they are "images that, when assented to, have an influence upon both the individual and society, which mere notions cannot exert."[108]

The sorts of discourses by which Taylor hopes to dispel illusion and bring about practical change are not necessarily the sorts of discourses best equipped to accomplish these tasks: a highly articulated

philosophical anthropology such as the one he espouses tends, by its
very nature, towards a rhetoric of exclusion which can only be
surmounted (as it cannot be penetrated) by a wholesale adoption. The
complex, articulate discourse of this kind of theory is a personal,
autobiographical construction of such sophistication that it almost
precludes participation or intellectual community; discipleship, rather,
is what is demanded:

> Willingly or unwillingly, philosophers, when
> they try to utter the unspelt aspirations of
> their age and draw, at the same time, from
> their personal resources, create, or co-create
> or perhaps actuate new languages. Some of
> those languages prove to be stillborn and
> quickly sink into oblivion. Some remain and
> strike roots in the soil of culture but then
> they usually are not immediately, naturally
> convincing or even intelligible. More often
> than not to understand a new language of
> philosophy is a matter of spiritual
> conversion: the act of understanding and
> believing are undistinguishable, perhaps even
> the latter precedes the former.[109]

Thus it seems that "a philosophy becomes intelligible through a
kind of initiation which is not preceded by an act of understanding,"
which is the reason that "philosophers so often complain about being
misunderstood."[110] Whereas Charles Taylor believes that "greater
lucidity can help us see our way to a reconciliation [of moral
conflict]," which is "the potential goal and fruit of articulacy," we
have on the contrary reason to believe that an increasingly
sophisticated articulation of practice sharpens conflict.[111] An
increase in theoretical articulacy is a technically virtuosic demand for
assent to an increasingly idiosyncratic personal vision. Theoretical

articulacy heightens the ongoing contest of interpretations, raises its

stakes, for "there is no banality so banal that its meaning would not be

occasionally challenged or contested by philosophers":[112]

> Therefore it is likely - if we trust the
> guidance of historical experience - that
> mutually un-understandable and incongruous
> idioms will compete with each other. Among
> all possible, infinitely numerous, languages,
> none is probably all-encompassing save the
> lingua incognita Dei.[113]

Taylor grudgingly concedes that his meta-theoretical commitment to

articulacy may not always be conducive to an irenic politics, noting

that "if reconciliation is impossible, then articulacy will buy us much

greater inner conflict."[114] Interestingly, however, Taylor holds that

if such psychic, social, and discursive reconciliation does prove

impossible, the impossibility is due to a lack of recognition, on

someone's part, of the "full range" of goods "to which we cannot but

hold allegiance .... "[115] He does not advert to the possibility that

theory itself might play a part in widening the impasse, by advancing a

construct too idiosyncratic for anyone to accept.

Taylor, unlike the Kantian aesthete, does not expect to woo his

interlocutors; rather, he expects them to "develop their insights" and

to recognize the truth of his articulations. Believing, however, is not

seeing alone; it is an active movement through moments of thinking away

the past, coming to a judgement in the present, and willing into the

future. To see the subjects of one's inquiry, the recipients of one's

theoretical activity, in this way is to acknowledge that they are

something more, and something other, than figures upon the field of a

textual page. This acknowledgement is not an easy one for Taylor, and herein lies the cause of his failure to develop a convincing account of human community. His theory of practice leaves him without a means to understand the movement of will that transcends the contingencies of political life in order to found a community; that is to say, it leaves him without an understanding of the phenomenon of consent.

Consent is the act of goodwill, that is, of a good will, that is the ultimate fruit of political judgement. After a particular practice, or network of practices, or a product thereof, has been thought, its shifting complexities wrested from the past's sticky conceptual web, and judged to be good, true, or beautiful in its particularity, one final act of mind (and, to appropriate a traditional image, heart) remains before it becomes a phenomenon of significance _for practice_. It must become the object of a peculiar kind of commitment, an act of will which bestows worth upon it. Such bestowal is an absolutely incalculable act, which cannot be subsumed under a concept or explained in terms of a cause. It is an act of free will which, like the regard which is granted to a loved one, confers an indefinite licence and authority upon its object. It is an imaginative act, which makes its object worthy, makes it canonical. It limits cannot be specified in advance; an assessment of its strength waits upon the passage of time and circumstance. And, because it is a commitment whose limits are unclear, which moreover looks toward the future, it cannot be thematized in terms of a visual metaphor. It is a call and a response.[116]

Neither can such bestowal, or consent of the most encompassing kind, be eliminated from political discourse as a perpetual problem. Though it may periodically be a rare kind of action, it is that which founds political community, just as "love creates its own community."[117] It is an imaginative bridging of distances, which puts its servants at the disposal of a city, a party, or a movement, just as one might imagine that Northrop Frye was put at Shakespeare's disposal, Vladimir Ashkenazy at Beethoven's, or Romeo at Juliet's. The distances of time, space, and cultural difference are thus bridged not by a mediating concept, but by an intense commitment, an act of identification which willingly singles out an object as worthy of one's fidelity. Inasmuch as it is an easier thing for a greater number to identify with the symbol of the Crucifixion than with the Summa Theologiae, for example, the paramountcy of the cultural paradigm over the conceptual system is assured in matters touching upon the formation and perpetuation of all kinds of interpretive communities.

This is a mystery which Taylor's hermeneutics cannot hope to fathom, as the operation of the will into the darkness of the future cannot be schematized in terms of a visible configuration in which all the relevant particulars are already present. His theory therefore subsists at the level of appraisal, the determinate judgement that always stops short of bestowal, the discourse of "science, ambition, or morality," rather than of love. Appraisal admits only that sort of judgement which is definitive of Kantian morals, which subsumes the

particular under the general; it is a heteronomous judgement which imposes but will not be imposed upon:

> When appraisal occurs alone our attitude develops in the direction of science, ambition, or morality. To "do the right thing" we need not bestow value upon another person; we need only recognize the truth about his character and act appropriately .... Appraisal without bestowal may lead us to change other people regardless of what they want .... On this attitude great institutions are often built. But it is not a loving attitude.[118]

Charles Taylor's hermeneutics, a rhetoric of insight, vision, and recognition, seeks only to see and be seen, but never to pursue or win commitment. It is, perhaps, not a surprise that a notable Hegel scholar should believe that "the moral conflicts of modern culture" might be reconciled by a greater lucidity and articulacy.[119] But, as a Hegel scholar, Taylor should recognize that the panoramic view which is needed for a truly comprehensive appraisal strands one at the end of history, where there is no more present and no more future. The theorist who wishes to live in the present must love his partners in conversation as much as he hopes to be loved by them; that is, he must refrain from telling them all that he "knows" about them. For the soothsayer, once he has told all that he knows, nothing remains to be said, and this is surely a lonely life.

CHAPTER V

SOME CONCLUDING DOUBTS ABOUT TAYLOR'S THEORY OF PRACTICE

In the opening lines of the gnostic Gospel of Thomas, Jesus declares, "Whoever finds the interpretation of these sayings will not taste death."[1] And he continues, "Know what is in your sight, and what is hidden from you will become clear to you."[2]

Writing upon the theme of religion and rationality, Schopenhauer comments:

> The fundamental distinction between religions does not lie in whether they are monotheistic, polytheistic, pantheistic or atheistic (as Buddhism is), but in whether they are optimistic or pessimistic. The Old and New Testament are for this reason diametrically opposed, and their union forms a very strange centaur: for the Old Testament is optimistic, the New Testament pessimistic. The former is a tune in the major, the latter a tune in the minor.[3]

As optimistic as the Old Testament might sometimes be, it is an optimism which never matches that espoused by the early sects now grouped under the general rubric "gnosticism." These sects propounded a family of teachings which involved a number of significant rejections and a single, luminous affirmation. The gnostic, first of all, "tended to mistrust the body, regarding it as the saboteur that inevitably engaged him in suffering."[4] The body was regarded as the locus of a terribly ambiguous experience, from which the soul had to be delivered, a seduction by pleasure leading inexorably to a betrayal in pain. It is not surprising that a visual metaphor for self-knowledge was

particularly attractive to gnostic thinkers, because it seemed to
betoken the possibility of an escape from the ambiguities that stem from
humanity's temporal efflorescence and decay:

> ... two-dimensional perspective ... is adopted
> from a certain point of view in order to
> achieve a notation of the world that would be
> valid for everyone ... It congeals the lived
> perspective and, in order to represent what is
> perceived, adopts an index of deformation
> which is characteristic of my standpoint ...
> Since this deformation is systematic and
> occurs according to the same index in every
> part of the scene, it transports me amidst the
> very things and shows them to me as God sees
> them. Rather, to be more precise, two-
> dimensional perspective does not give me a
> human view of the world. It gives me
> knowledge that can be obtained from a human
> viewpoint by a god who does not get caught in
> finitude.[5]

Fearing the limitations of time and space, the gnostics sought a
self-knowledge which could transcend them. From this Olympian
perspective, the common occupations of mankind seemed but passing
trivialities. "If 'the many' - unenlightened people - believed that
they would find fulfillment in family life, sexual relationships,
business, politics, ordinary employment or leisure, the gnostic
rejected this belief as an illusion."[6] Instead, their radically
hermetic hermeneutics sought refuge from the uncertainties of the world
in a spiritually illumined discourse by which "humanity itself ... was
disclosed to be the 'God over all.'"[7] In the refuge of knowledge,
experience is overcome and the meaning of life is immanent;
interpretation defers death.

Eric Voegelin sees in gnosticism a perennially appealing intellectual, spiritual, and ultimately political tendency – which has, over time, gradually become a more and more potent threat to politics. "Its essence is 'the immanentization of the Christian eschaton': the belief in salvation beyond world and time becomes a belief in the transfiguration of man and society in this world and in our time."[8] The attempt at immanentizing the meaning of existence is fundamentally "an attempt at bringing our knowledge of transcendence into a firmer grip than the cognitio fidei, the cognition of faith, will afford; and Gnostic experiences offer this firmer grip in so far as they are an expansion of the soul to the point where God is drawn into the existence of man."[9]

Even if one accepts Voegelin's complex genealogical account of the intrusion of gnostic consciousness into modern times, which is not itself uncontroversial, what is to be feared about the immanentizing of the meaning of human existence in the here and now? Voegelin maintains that such immanentization involves the premature dissolution of Metaxy, the sense that, as thinking human beings, we exist in a state of tension between the noetic and the apeirontic, between the sublime certitude of knowing and the sense of awe that the boundlessness of our experience engenders.[10] Gnosticism is a loss of the sense that our boundaries are themselves bounded by boundlessness; that is, it is a loss of the consciousness of the ineffable. It is a casting aside of the uncertain certainties of the cognitio fidei in the search for a more immediate certainty.[11]

Gnosticism's optimism about the capacity of making meaning immediately present is a specious optimism, however, merely anxiety's smiling twin. For knowledge has its limits, difficult as they may be to describe, and the theoretical languages spawned by the gnostic drive for certainty fail to capture meaning; they succeed only in locking out the spirit of inquiry.[12] There is no theoretical language, however sophisticated, which can exhaust reality; "there is no language in the abstract, as some modern linguists appear to assume, by which man can refer to the hierophantic events of the noetic and pneumatic differentiations, but only the concrete language created in the articulation of the event."[13] Our civilization's great cultural, intellectual, and spiritual events cannot, therefore, be made the objects of a trans-historical discourse, which subordinates them to the truths of its concepts; although they are constituted, presented to the understanding, in language, it is a language that lives and dies within the matrix of practice. Language is a kind of practice, not a means for getting beyond it.

Theory itself is not so much a mapping of practice as an evocation thereof; it cannot be imposed upon a community, as definitive of that community, from a position of pure externality:

> ... theory as an explication of certain
> experiences is intelligible only to those in
> whom the explication will stir up parallel
> experiences as the empirical basis for testing
> the truth of theory. Unless a theoretical
> exposition activates the corresponding
> experiences at least to a degree, it will
> create the impression of empty talk or will
> perhaps be rejected as an irrelevant
> expression of subjective opinions. A

> theoretical debate can only be conducted among
> spoudaioi [the earnest, serious-minded, or
> concerned] in the Aristotelian sense; theory
> has no argument against a man who feels, or
> pretends to feel, unable of re-enacting the
> experience.[14]

Doubtless, Charles Taylor's political theory seeks to activate
certain experiences which Taylor would like to make normative. The
question is, to what extent he succeeds as he casts a wider and wider
interpretive net. As his focus widens from self-interpretation to the
meanings constitutive of political communities, to meta-narratives, to
concepts applied historically and cross-culturally, Taylor is dealing
with fragments of discourse further and further removed from the
practical contexts in which they had their being. Each succeeding
generalization involves a greater assertion of theoretical will. And
yet, he insists, at each stage a definitive interpretation or mapping of
practice is possible.

Taylor's hermeneutic theory of practice thus assumes a gnostic
character, the aspirations of an intellectualist gnosis which assumes
"the form of a speculative penetration of the mystery of creation and
existence .... "[15] Like the ancient gnostics, Taylor denies the
ambiguity that arises from the contingencies of physical experience; the
tacit elements of practice are always resolved into the visibility of
the discursive. Also like the gnostics, Taylor is willing to trade the
practice of politics for knowledge thereof; there is little point in
wooing the unenlightened, spending time with them in deliberation, when
what is really required is to see, to know, and to tell. And so,
ultimately, Taylor's theorist withdraws into a hermetic science, a

secure vantage point from which to observe and to map the meanings that are immanent in discourse.

Seeing, Camille Paglia maintains, is an apotropaion, a "warding off of fear."[16] It serves in this way because "the eye is peremptory in its judgements"; moreover, "each of our glances is as much exclusion as inclusion."[17] Taylor's visual metaphor assuages theoretical anxiety by its exclusions as much as by its inclusions. The act of inclusion is of course significant; by conceiving meaning as immanent within discourse, visible upon the pages of the social text-analogue, it confers a godlike status upon the theorist who sees, recognizes, and identifies meaning. The very assertion of meaning's immanence, its immediate presence, dispels anxiety about its possible absence, for those gnostic temperaments who desire a "possessive experience" of meaning, who are not content to wait upon things unseen.[18]

Perhaps more importantly, though, vision's uniquely peremptory judgements exclude the contest of interpretations which can so threaten theory's claim to a heteronomous authority. Vision's "cognitive polarization" allows the theorist simply to put an unpalatable interpretation "out of the picture." Interpretations which have fallen into disfavour, for example, the idea of a "consensus politics," may simply be written off as obscurities or illusions. From such "judgements" there is no appeal, for the truth is there for all to see.

In the end, Taylor's political theory presents itself in terms remarkably reminiscent of Taylor's own criticism of Hegel's phenomenology:

> ... his thesis that the Absolute must finally come to complete, explicit clarity in conceptual statement gives the primacy in the end to the descriptive dimension. Our explicit consciousness is no longer surrounded by a horizon of the implicit, of unreflected life and experience .... On the contrary, in the Hegelian synthesis the unclear consciousness of the beginning is itself made part of the chain of conceptual necessity. The unclear and inarticulate, just as the external and contingent, is itself shown to have a necessary existence. The approximate and incompletely formed is itself derived in exact, articulate concepts.[19]

Must theory, to be theory, follow the example of Taylor's hermeneutics, his proposed theory of practice? Must it deny the ambiguity of language, the plurality of participants in public life, and the potentially tragic contest of political interpretations their meaning, their very reality?

Theory's narrative is a tale of the circulation of metaphors, a tale which is in no danger of coming to its end. Citing Vossner, Michael Polanyi writes, "The true artists of speech ... remain always conscious of the metaphorical character of language. They go on correcting and supplementing one metaphor by another, allowing their words to contradict each other and attending only to the unity and certainty of their thought."[20] There is always one more metaphor to correct and supplement theory's work, as it works to correct and supplement the work of thought:

> Someone might object that the more a work tends toward the multiplication of possibilities, the further it departs from that unicum which is the _self_ of the writer, his inner sincerity and the discovery of his own truth. But I would answer: Who are we, who is each one of us, if not a combinatoria

of experiences, information, books we have read, things imagined? Each life is an encyclopedia, a library, an inventory of objects, a series of styles, and everything can be constantly shuffled and reordered in every way conceivable.[21]

As we have not yet reached the end of history, there are many stories which yet may be told; therefore, we may hold out some modest hope that theory's possibilities have not been completely exhausted. Hans-Georg Gadamer suggests that "the art of thinking beautifully" might be realized more fully were we to conceive it in terms of the arts of speech.[22] Indeed, Gadamer makes such an attempt in his hermeneutic theory, which employs the metaphor of interpretation as conversation.

The conversation metaphor is one which can help us to reclaim some of the experiences excluded by Taylor's visually conditioned hermeneutics. Ambiguity, for example, is no longer taboo. "In conversation, 'facts' appear only to be resolved once more into the possibilities from which they were made; 'certainties' are shown to be combustible, not by being brought in contact with other 'certainties' or with doubts, but by being kindled by the presence of ideas of another order; approximations are revealed between ideas normally remote from one another."[23] Ambiguity pervades both the mode and the matter of a conversation: the mode, because of the sensuous and temporal character of speech itself, and the matter, because the free play of conversational dialogue allows (and may even encourage) ambiguity in its locutionary dimension.

If theory is a conversation, it may also reclaim the significance of human plurality, for "it is impossible in the absence of a diversity

of voices .... "[24] There must be at least two parties to a conversation, of course, and they must listen to each other; the presence of the other is perceived, not as a threat, but as the occasion of appreciation and enjoyment. Following Arendt, one could say that a conversation is characterized by equality and distinction; the partners must be distinct, otherwise the conversation would lack any subject matter, but at the same time, they are equal at least in the sense that they are each willing to give their attention to a question of common interest. "To conduct a conversation," writes Gadamer, "means to allow oneself to be conducted by the object to which the partners in the conversation are directed."[25] The conversation thus creates a sort of community, bringing the partners into a relationship of willing dependence upon one another.

A conversation, finally, allows for a modicum of interpretive contest, which can be sustained indefinitely, as long as the partners are willing. "In it," says Oakeshott, "different universes of discourse meet, acknowledge each other and enjoy an oblique relationship which neither requires nor forecasts their being assimilated to one another."[26] Parties to the conversation must treat each other with courtesy, but this does not entail that they must reach an agreement, simply that they make "the object [of discussion] and all its possibilities fluid."[27]

The conversation metaphor is a homely one; it lacks the grandeur and sweep of the visual metaphor as it appears in Plato's Symposium. If theory were a conversation, it could promise neither to situate meaning

nor to find a "radical hope in history."[28]   It would invite discussion,
but it could not adjudicate; in a realm of study often called normative,
it could be merely suggestive.

If theory were a matter of hearing rather than seeing, it would, of
necessity, be a certain kind of practice bound up with other practices,
a theory _in_ rather than _of_ practice.   However modest it might be,
though, it could legitimately aspire to certain important interpretive
virtues: receptiveness, sensitivity, and attentiveness to the rhythmic
interplay of identity and difference. Ambiguity of tone, plurality of
voice, and the rivalry of competing interpretations would neither
confuse nor frustrate such a theory, but could be taken up into its
deliberations.

A theorist who is at home in the aural world has descended from the
Olympian heights into a labyrinth of voice which echoes with the sound
of many discussions. Like Martin Heidegger's poet, such a theorist must
cultivate "an ever more painstaking listening."[29]   Listening for
meaning's resonance, however faint, is an act of hope, and of patience.
"They also serve," writes Milton, "who only stand and wait."[30]   To
understand how and why this is so is the task of a political theory that
is concerned with the diverse particularities of political life, that
has broken free of the idea of a theory of practice.

ENDNOTES, CHAPTER I

1. Plutarch, "A Letter of Condolence to Apollonius," in Moralia, vol.
    II, 116c, trans. Frank Cole Babbitt, Loeb Classical   Library
    (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1956), p. 183.

2. Eliza Gregory Wilkins, The Delphic Maxims In Literature (Chicago:
    The University of Chicago Press, 1929), p. 49.   Transliterated
    from the Greek alphabet, the maxim is given as gnothi sauton; in
    Latin it is rendered nosce te ipsum.

3. Ibid., pp. 211-13.

4. See G. Douglas Atkins and Laura Morrow, eds., Contemporary
    Literary Theory (Amherst, Massachusetts: The University of
    Massachusetts Press, 1989), chaps. 4, 5, and 7.

5   Arthur O. Lovejoy, The Great Chain of Being (Cambridge,
    Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1936), p. 15.   Conal
    Condren offers a superbly lucid critique of Lovejoy's approach in
    his Status and Appraisal of Classic Texts: An Essay on
    Political Theory, Its Inheritance, and the History of Ideas
    (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1985), p. 104
    et. seq.

6. Condren, op. cit., p. 287.

7. See Hans-Georg Gadamer's criticism of Schleiermacher's hermeneutics
    in Truth and Method (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1986),
    pp. 164-73.

8. Condren, op. cit., p. 113.

9. Ibid., pp. 109-10.

10. Condren thus rejects all forms of structuralist atomism in favour
    of something more closely akin to a structuralist holism which, in
    the words of Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, would not seek to
    define the parts of a text "except within the field which
    identifies and individuates them." Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul
    Rabinow, Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics,
    2d. ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. 55.

11. Condren, op. cit., p. 111.

12. Northrop Frye, Words With Power: Being A Second Study of "The
    Bible and Literature" (Markham, Ontario: Viking Books, 1990),
    p. 66. Without the synoptic descriptive functioning of ideas,
    how would we discuss "power", "government", or even "taxation
    policy"?

13. Hannah Arendt, <u>The Life of the Mind: Willing</u>, One-vol. ed. (New York: Harvest Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Books, Inc., 1978), p.89.

14. Michel Foucault, "The Discourse on Language", in <u>The Archaeology of Knowledge and "The Discourse on Language</u>," trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982), p. 219.

15. <u>Ibid.</u>

16. William Blake, "Annotations to The Works of Sir Joshua Reynolds," ed. Edmond Malone, in <u>The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake</u>, ed. David V. Erdman, commentary by Harold Bloom (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1965), p. 630.

17. Arendt, <u>op</u>. <u>cit</u>., p. 89.

18. <u>Ibid</u>., p. 96.

19. Richard Rorty, <u>Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature</u> (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1979), pp. 5-6.

20. Edith Hamilton, <u>The Greek Way</u> (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1983), p. 30.

21. <u>Ibid</u>., p. 29.

22. <u>Ibid</u>., p. 10. Ortega y Gasset has taught us to be sceptical of anything like an "eternal perspective"; to posit such a thing is to exceed the bounds of the metaphor which would express the idea:

> "... all epochs and all peoples have been able to enjoy the measure of truth which suits them, and there is no sense in any people or epoch setting up in opposition to the rest, as if their particular share of truth were the repository of the whole of it. All have their fixed position in the historical series; none can legitimately aim at abandoning their posts, for such an act would be the equivalent of converting the agent into an abstract entity, and this would involve a total renunciation of existence ....
>
> ... A reality which remained the same from whatever point of view it was observed would be a ridiculous conception." Jose Ortega y Gasset, <u>The Modern Theme</u> , trans. James Clough (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1961), pp. 89-90.

23. J.G. Frazer, The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion, abridged ed. (London: Papermac, 1987), p. 265.

24. See Edith Hamilton, Mythology (New York: New American Library, 1969), pp. 54-62 passim.

25. Frazer, op. cit., p. 388. See also Walter Burkert, Greek Religion, trans. John Raffan (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1985), p. 297.

26. Friedrich Nietzsche, Ecce Homo, trans. Walter Kaufmann, in On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1969), p. 254.

27. Friedrich Nietzsche, The Anti-Christ, trans. R.J. Hollingdale, in Twilight of the Idols/The Anti-Christ (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1986), p. 178.

28. Friedrich Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy, trans. Walter Kaufmann, in the Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1987), p. 104.

29. Ibid.

30. Ibid.

31. Aristotle, Metaphysics 980a, in The Basic Works of Aristotle, ed. Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, Inc., 1941), p. 689. All subsequent references to Aristotle are made to this edition of his works.

32. Ibid., 1074b, in Basic Works, p. 885.

33. Jaroslav Pelikan, The Melody of Theology: A Philosophical Dictionary (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1988), p. 6.

34. Condren, op. cit., p. 26.

35. A simple identification of the language of technique with the language of politics is not possible, for philosophy may concern itself just as easily with technique as with ethics, as a brief survey of the history of analytic philosphy would amply demonstrate. Likewise, even the most canny of political operators may, from time to time, and in his own terms, give thought to questions of values and ends.

36. Reinhold Niebuhr, Moral Man and Immoral Society (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1960), p. 171.

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37. Harry V. Jaffa, "Aristotle" in History of Political Philosophy, 2d. ed., ed. Leo Strauss and Joseph Cropsey (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 72.

38. Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, 1094b, in Basic Works, p. 936.

39. Eric Voegelin, The New Science of Politics: An Introduction (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 4.

40. John Maynard Keynes, The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money. Collected Works, vol. VII (London: Macmillan/ Cambridge University Press, for the Royal Economic Society, 1973), p. 383.

41. Dante Germino, "Eric Voegelin's Framework for Political Evaluation in His Recently Published Work," in Eric Voegelin's Thought: A Critical Appraisal, ed. Ellis Sandoz (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1982), p. 116

42. Walter Kaufmann, Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist, 4th ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), pp. 402-403.

43. Friedrich Nietzsche, The Will to Power, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), pp. 227-28.

44. Charles Taylor, Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 103.

45. Ibid.

46. Charles Taylor, "Social Theory As Practice," in Philosophy and the Human Sciences: Philosophical Papers II (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 91.

47. Ibid. See Pierre Bourdieu, Outline of a Theory of Practice, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

48. William Barrett, The Illusion of Technique (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1979), p. xiii.

49. Charles Taylor, The Explanation of Behaviour (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1964).

50. Ibid., p. 25.

51. Charles Taylor, Hegel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975).

52. <u>Ibid.</u>, p. 571.

53. Charles Taylor, "Self-Interpreting Animals," in <u>Human Agency and Language: Philosophical Papers I</u> (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p.45.

54. <u>Ibid.</u>, p. 76.

55. Brice R. Wachterhauser, "Introduction: History and Language in Understanding," in <u>Hermeneutics and Modern Philosophy</u>, ed. Brice R. Wachterhauser (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1986), pp. 5-6.

56. Condren, <u>op. cit.</u>, p. 30.

57. Hannah Arendt, <u>The Human Condition</u> (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958), p. 222.

58. Plato, <u>The Republic</u>, 518c; 508e, in <u>The Collected Dialogues, Including the Letters</u>, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton: Bollingen Series LXXI, Princeton University Press, 1987), pp. 750-51; p. 744. All subsequent references to Plato are made to this edition of his works.

59. Arendt, <u>The Human Condition</u>, p. 14.

60. It may also be that many of us are guilty of taking Plato too seriously, or at least of neglecting ironic counter-currents in his writings. John Seery, for one, believes that <u>The Republic</u> is not meant to be taken entirely literally, but rather as a Socratic "suggestive moment" which is no sooner advanced than it is retracted. See John Seery, "Politics as Ironic Community: On the Themes of Descent and Return in Plato's <u>Republic</u>," <u>Political Theory</u>, Vol. 16, No. 2 (May 1988):244-45. If <u>The Republic</u> does not seem as brashly ironic as, say, <u>Gulliver's Travels</u>, perhaps it is no less so than Thomas More's <u>Utopia</u>.

61. Plato, <u>op. cit.</u>, 433, in <u>The Collected Dialogues</u>, pp. 74-75.

62. Plato, <u>Protagoras</u>, 356d sq., in <u>The Collected Dialogues</u>, p. 347.

63. Here one may catch a glimmer of irony, since the ostensible prescription seems so clearly at odds with the deliberative form of the dialogues.

64. Michael T. Gibbons, "Introduction: The Politics of Interpretation," in <u>Interpreting Politics</u>, ed. Michael T. Gibbons (Washington Square, New York: New York University Press, 1987), p. 1.

65. Charles Taylor, "Kant's Theory of Freedom," in _Philosophy and the Human Sciences: Philosophical Papers II_ (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 325.

66. Tom Rockmore, _Habermas on Historical Materialism_ (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), p. 149.

67. Immanuel Kant, _Critique of Pure Reason_, A842/B870, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (London: Macmillan Education Limited, 1989), pp. 661-62.

68. Immanuel Kant, "On the Common Saying: 'This May Be True in Theory, but it does not Apply in Practice'," in _Kant's Political Writings_, ed. Hans Reiss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 61.

69. _Ibid._, p. 63.

70. Michel Foucault, "The Art of Telling the Truth," in _Michel Foucault: Politics, Philosophy, Culture_, ed. Lawrence D. Kritzman (New York: Routledge, Chapman & Hall, Inc., 1988), p. 95.

71. Allen W. Wood, _Hegel's Ethical Thought_ (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 228.

72. _Ibid._

73. Leszek Kolakowski, _Main Currents of Marxism: Volume 1 - The Founders_ (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 79.

74. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, _Philosophy of Right_, trans. T.M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), pp. 12-13.

75. Karl Marx, "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's _Philosophy of Right_: Introduction," in _The Marx-Engels Reader_, 2d ed., ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1978), p. 65.

76. Karl Marx, Preface to _Capital_, in _The Marx-Engels Reader_, 2d ed., ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1978), p. 302.

77. Karl Marx, _Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844_, in _The Marx-Engels Reader_, 2d ed., ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1978), p. 108.

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