



thinking beyond sterile dichotomies between civic/universalistic and ethnic/particularistic national identities. The problematic of ‘stories of peoplehood’ helpfully mediates these conceptual extremes. Moreover, his emphasis on trust, worth, and the ethical dimension grapples more deeply with problems of identity than those approaches that simply stress the binding force of shared symbols, or the tendency of identities to be constructed through symbolic oppositions. Although he does not really engage the literature on narrativity, Smith provides a valuable counterweight to those approaches that become overly formalistic in their application of literary genres to the complexities of social life. His looser concept of ‘stories’ helps us to appreciate how senses of collective worth and trust are cultivated through historical imaginings.

This book puts its trust in humanistic reason — if all stories are allowed to speak, the best will prevail. But history might be more cunning than this, and the interplay of stories may have unintended consequences not foreseen by any particular story. Finally, Smith deliberately sets questions of force in politics to one side (p. 43), to focus his attention on the persuasive power of these stories. But power takes other forms besides force and persuasion — manipulation; legitimation; coercion; inducement — forms that may be highly relevant to how these stories do their work. One wishes at points for a more rounded engagement with the power of stories in this book. Nonetheless, it is thought-provoking and breathes a bit of life into some rather fusty theoretical debates, and is most welcome for that.

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Modern Social Imaginaries

Charles Taylor

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In *Modern Social Imaginaries*, Taylor traces the development of the modern Western social imaginary. A social imaginary consists of ‘the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations’ (p. 23). Taylor’s aim in the book is to reveal both the similarities and differences in the multiple forms of modernity present in the contemporary



world, which he argues is most clearly accomplished by examining the different social imaginaries involved.

He begins by identifying the idea of moral order presented in the natural law theories of Grotius and Locke as the theoretical foundation for the modern Western social imaginary. This is because they contain new conceptions of rights, equality and political legitimacy, which have come almost completely to dominate political thought and institutions through influencing and transforming social practices. The new moral order is argued to have gained the strength to drive this transformation in two ways: first, through the ‘taming’ of the feudal nobility as states became more concerned with commerce and less so with war. This meant a different way of life for the nobility, as civil governors rather than war leaders, and saw the rise of ideals of courtesy and civility. Civility was not understood as a natural condition for humans — individuals had to strive to improve themselves — and Taylor connects this development with the religious reforms of the time, especially Calvinism, which is given as one example of how the project of improving oneself spread from the elites to the masses. Second, Taylor points to the ‘great disembedding’ of individuals, which occurred with the progress of disenchantment. The ‘great disembedding’ refers to the end of the compromise between religion as an individual activity of obedience and rationally understood virtue, and the collective rituals of whole societies, in favour of the former. This meant that more important positions in certain rituals no longer related to a higher position in society, and therefore that certain forms of entrenched inequality, domination and exploitation could be questioned and dismantled.

Taylor then isolates three forms of social self-understanding, which he argues are essential to modernity. These are: the economy, the public sphere and democratic self-rule. The rise of the market economy, and the understanding of this economy as governed by an invisible hand, are seen as leading to a new understanding of society based on the concept of mutual benefit. This also gives us a more complex view of society. Some features of society, such as the public sphere, give rise to an understanding of society as a collective agency, whereas the invisible hand governance of economic interaction denies just that. The importance of the public sphere to modernity is thought to lie in the fact that it enabled the development of public opinion, which came to be seen as a significant factor in the legitimation of governments. Rational views can be formed through critical debate in the public sphere, which can be attributed to society as a whole, and this public opinion should then guide government. Taylor claims that this came to be seen as an essential feature of a free society. Another such feature is the third type of social self-understanding: the sovereignty of the people. The discussion of this aspect of modernity contrasts the French and the American revolutions to show how very different understandings of popular sovereignty caused different problems in the



development of ultimately similar institutions, and to emphasize that the understandings of these institutions, which form part of the social imaginary, are still very different today.

In the final part of the book, Taylor considers some other changes that have been brought about by the change in the underlying conception of moral order, in the context of the secular nature of modernity. By 'secular' Taylor does not mean the absence of religion, rather he points to the different place that religion occupies in modern society. This can be seen from the absence of religion in the founding of modern nations. The stories of the origins of societies used to refer to 'higher' time, which contrasted with the 'profane' time of ordinary life. However, the dominant idea in modernity is that a people can exist prior to any political constitution, and can therefore give itself a constitution by its own free action in secular time. Taylor holds that founding stories will then cite the growth and maturation of societies, enabling the establishment of a new order. Modern societies are thus no longer structured by a dependence on God, although religion still plays a role in individual and public life. It is in this sense that modernity is secular.

Taylor's aim in this book was to reveal the differences in modern Western political cultures, which are often masked by the presence of very similar institutional forms. This understanding of difference allows us to recognize the greater differences in the social imaginaries of different civilizations, and to see that Europe offers just one model, not the model, of modernity. It is then, he says, that 'the real positive work, of building mutual understanding, can begin' (p. 196). *Modern Social Imaginaries* is subtle, complex and thought-provoking. It is a valuable contribution to the literature on a wide range of concerns within political philosophy and beyond.

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Culture and Democracy: Media, Space and Representation

Clive Barnett

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Clive Barnett concludes and sums up the main thrust of this work by emphasizing that the 'Dewey-like formula of "culture and democracy" in the title of this book is meant to signal a commitment to a post-foundational,