

Figuring and Resonance: Charles Taylor and the Mysteries of Language

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In this article, we clarify the relevance of Charles Taylor's theory of language to his religious thought. Taylor's thought is multifaceted, but from his earlier works to *The Language Animal* (2016), he has consistently pursued philosophical questions concerning human language. There is no doubt that language is a topic central to his entire career. On the other hand, since the publication of *A Secular Age* (2007), Taylor has also been one of the leading thinkers on religion and secularity in today's world. Taylor's Catholic faith is well known, and it has often been pointed out that a certain religious motivation may underlie his philosophical arguments. We try to offer a reading in which these two important aspects of Taylor's thought can be understood coherently together.

Taylor's view of language allows much room for mystery. What Taylor calls "human meanings" or "meta-biological meanings" cannot be fully explained by the "designative" view of language. Taylor argues that human meanings are not independent of linguistic expression. Our ability to articulate things with language is crucial for objective meaning per se. This "expressive-constitutive" view of language, which was elucidated in *The Language Animal*, has important insights in common with his religious faith. For one, Taylor insists that the creativity of metaphors, or the "figuring" dimension of language in general, cannot be separated from our incarnated existence. This insight easily resonates with the biblical image of "the Word made flesh." The mystery of the incarnation is a key concept for understanding Taylor's Catholic faith. Taylor also claims that mystery accompanies language whenever it plays a crucial role in rituals. The performative force of language creates "communion." Rituals enable us to relate to the world in a new way, a way in which the meaning of the cosmic order can be reformulated and retrieved. Poetic language is the prime example in this regard. Thus, for Taylor, human language is mysterious in many ways.