

The Language Animal: The Full Shape of the Human Language Capacity. By Charles Taylor. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016. Pp. x + 352. \$35.

In a recent public lecture held in conjunction with an exhibit of nineteenth century mystical landscapes, Taylor remarked that *The Language Animal* is the companion volume to a forthcoming study of the portrayal of liminal meaning in post-Romantic poetics. In this masterful precursor volume T. prepares readers to re-engage questions about their place in the cosmic order by reflecting about the origins, development and characteristics of human language. T. presents his propaedeutic treatment as a response to the contention between post-Cartesian designative-instrumental (Hobbes, Locke, and Condillac) and post-Kantian constitutive-expressive (Hamann, Herder, and Humboldt) approaches to language. Although he does not attempt to retrieve a pre-Cartesian reading of theories of knowing in identity such as presented by the Thomist interpreter Bernard Lonergan, T. advances a carefully nuanced form of realism as he probes the intellectual tensions shaping and stemming from the Enlightenment.

T. acknowledges the refinements added by Gottlob Frege, Donald Davidson, Robert Brandom, and other analytic philosophers to the designative-instrumental account but rejects their tendency to privilege rigorous definition and disambiguation of terms and relations as establishing the complete context and normative criteria for understanding the development and assessing the accomplishments of language. Reversing the ascendancy of the designative-instrumental account and its implied norms, T. turns to evolutionary cognition and social communication theorists such as George Herbert Mead, Lev Vygotsky, and Michael Tomasello to describe the development of language and its appropriation by newborns. For T., the communication of humanly motivated, “metabiological” meaning arises from the felt intuitions embedded within the focused attention shared by infants and caregivers, and contoured interactively in their intimate “protoconversations” (53). He argues that the emergence and maturation of such embodied meaning provides the context for the development of the third party descriptive language employed in scientific investigation. Understood as a specialized adaptation of constitutive-expressive language, designative-instrumental language neither reflects the complete nature of language nor presents the exhaustive normative criteria for its use.

T. clarifies his discussion of the nature of language by distinguishing three types of semantic logic—designative logic addressing phenomena existing independently apart from human inquiry, constitutive logic shaping at least in part the realities that it describes, and a third form of logic constituting the fundamental terms underpinning the scientific accounts advanced by designative logic. Although he locates the scientific language employed to describe natural phenomenon within a more comprehensive view of the nature of language, T. does not probe the cognitive processes per se that observe data, identify and correlate explanatory terms to construct hypotheses, and apply statistical tests to verify the actual frequency and distribution of the posited events. Nor does he address the emergence of personal, public, scientific and religious reference frames that reflects a movement toward less self-centered and self-motivated understandings of world and cosmic processes.

T.'s legitimate prioritization of constitutive-expressive language leaves him suspicious of pre-linguistic "enframing" theories of cognitional activity (33–34) that constrain language to the description of prior interior states of consciousness. One wonders if this suspicion could be eased and a path to further clarification opened by supplanting Cartesian influenced correspondence theories of truth verification with approaches that recognize the reciprocal, proportionate relation between ideas and their expression in language. To paraphrase Thomas Aquinas, we understand not by ideas but in ideas; specific acts of understanding which T. and his modern interlocutors would contend are formed and assessed most fully in intersubjective discourse.

T.'s discussion of the figuring of felt intuitions, lived enactment and artistic portrayal of meaning, linguistic and other forms of symbolic expression, and the reflective control of meaning afforded by theoretic hermeneutical argument points his readers towards just such a progressive and interactive assessment of human expression and its accounts of truth, goodness, and beauty. He appropriately draws his reader's critical attention to the contested values and differential power relations constituted and reinforced by the register (linguistic tone) and implied social footing of discourse. T. presents a cogent account of how constitutive-expressive meaning precedes, accompanies and surpasses the designative-instrumental function of language.

By attending to the integral dynamics of the production and control of human meaning, T. promotes the direct role of human agency in assessing the legitimacy of social orders and norms over indirect approaches such as etiology and other types of mythology. He prefers to highlight the internal responsibility of the meaning-maker over the external accountability (or control) mediated by reified, mythic accounts. While T. makes an invaluable contribution to understanding the social dimensions of agency and discourse, the reader wonders if there must likewise be a social dimension to a proportionate control of meaning that escapes the internal–external binary. Perhaps T. will return in his forthcoming volume to explore further how mythology might be understood as serving the requirements of social agency and the liminal promise of yet fuller human meaning.

Gordon Rixon, SJ
Regis College, University of Toronto

Tradition and Church Reform: Perspective on Catholic Moral Teaching. By Charles E. Curran. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2016. Pp. viii + 294. \$32.

The Catholic Church's tradition and history of moral teaching is long, complicated, and sometimes controversial. In this volume, Charles Curran manages to succinctly present an in-depth look at the history of the Catholic moral tradition, current issues of Catholic moral theology, and directions for the future of moral theology. As a collection of articles and essays previously presented or published elsewhere, single chapters can be read alone but work best as a whole. Taken together, these chapters represent a culmination of C.'s long career and significant contributions to the field of Catholic ethics.