

‘THE RANGE OF GOODS WE LIVE BY’: SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE GARNER CONTROVERSY

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As you’ll gather, my interest in *The First Stone* isn’t so much in the details of the the so-called ‘Ormond College affair’ as in the terms or discourses in which it has been framed, first by Garner herself and then by the various commentators who have written on her book. My ultimate aim is to set the book and the commentary in a broad and I hope illuminating framework of ideas; ideas partly derived from the Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor. Taylor is a Catholic, and although that orientation is important as an ultimate horizon in his work, he’s certainly not a ‘Catholic philosopher’ in the sense that his philosophical arguments depend on a body of faith. The respect in which he’s held in philosophical and literary circles, especially in the US, extends well beyond the Catholic community. One reason for highlighting his work this morning is that he doesn’t seem to be as well known as he deserves to be here in Australia. My title, ‘The range of goods we live by’, is taken from Taylor’s book, *Sources of the Self: the Making of the Modern Identity*, first published in 1989. I hope that, by the end, you’ll see the point of that title, as well as my point in making such extensive reference to Charles Taylor’s work.

The Australian’s editorial of 9 August 1995 described *The First Stone* as a ‘defining moment in the history of contemporary culture’. I think many of us would probably go along with this, in whatever terms we might construe that ‘moment’: either at one extreme, as this editorial saw it, as the long-awaited time when ‘certain perverse trends in contemporary radical feminism [were flushed] out into the open’, or at the other, as the year that the 1990s anti-feminist backlash really got cracking in Australia. However we see it, *The First Stone* has, as another commentator has said, clearly touched ‘some contemporary nerve’ (Manne) and in that sense it is an important document to ponder in order to understand more about ourselves as a culture.

But however important *The First Stone* might be as a cultural document, it is also very decidedly, as Helen Garner herself concedes, a book ‘full of holes’.¹ I myself would identify at least four major ones.

The first and most obvious one is that it doesn’t give the perspective of the women at the centre of the Ormond affair. As we all know, one major

reason for this is that the complainants in the case refused to talk to Garner. As one critic points out, this refusal is the 'absent centre' around which Garner's narrative spirals; not least because her determination to tell the story is partly energised by what looked like their determination to keep possession of it. From Garner's point of view, this refusal was infuriatingly frustrating. If they had nothing to hide, why didn't they speak to her? Didn't they recognise her own feminist credentials? If she was missing the point, why didn't they try to show it to her, to convince her? After all, they were university people, supposedly committed to free and open discussion. Why then this secrecy? It's not hard to see how their refusal might have confirmed in Garner's mind the impression she already had that the women were 'illiberal', committed above all to controlling events for their own political purposes. Now that we have the version of events given to us by Dr Jenna Mead, who was the senior woman at Ormond and adviser and support to the students concerned, we can also see something of their perspective. They had been through months attempting to get what they saw as an obstructive and even intimidatory College council to attend to their complaints in a satisfactory way, and then through the anxieties and frustrations of a court case and an appeal that finally exonerated the Master. It was doubtful, once the law was involved, whether they would have spoken to Garner in any case. But it's not hard to see how they might have been utterly resolved in their position once a copy of Helen Garner's letter to the Master came into their possession. Garner wrote:

What I want to say is that it's heartbreaking, for a feminist of nearly fifty like me, to see our Ideals of so many years distorted into this ghastly punitiveness. I expect I will never know what 'really happened', but I certainly know that if there was an incident, as alleged, this has been the most appallingly destructive, priggish and pitiless way of dealing with it. I want you to know that there are plenty of women out there who step back in dismay from the kind of treatment you have received, and who still hope that men and women, for all our foolishness and mistakes, can behave towards each other with kindness rather than being engaged in this kind of warfare... (16)

Allan Patience, in an sane and balanced account of the book² calls this letter 'impulsive' and 'hastily judgemental', and there's some justice in these terms. He also points out that Garner's mind seems to be irrevocably made up. Terms like 'ghastly punitiveness', 'appallingly destructive' and 'pitiless' can only have suggested to the women that Garner was 'out to get them'. It's certainly understandable, at the very least, that they gave her a wide berth. But Garner, in her understandable frustration with them and sympathy for the Master, doesn't seem able to allow herself to entertain

what Emanuel Levinas would call the 'otherness' of their perspective - and it is this constriction of imagination, over and above sheer ignorance of the facts, that constitutes the first 'hole' in her book.

The second is Garner's inability to understand why the women went to the police. Garner is so much moved by seeing the consequences of the court case and its attendant publicity on the Master and his family, together with questions of the proportionality of justice raised by these consequences, that she is inclined to a reductive view of events of the kind 'he touched her on the breast and she went to the cops' - and his life was ruined as a consequence. What this view implies is that the students went *straight* to the police. In what *The Canberra Times* calls the 'Other Side' of the Ormond story, Jenna Mead takes Garner to task for the notion that the students concerned rejected all possibility of reconciliation. 'This is an astonishing distortion of the facts,' says Mead. 'As an eye witness to these events, I saw the students constantly rebuffed and pressured. Those students spent six months trying to resolve their complaints to Ormond College, confidentially.' Only when that approach failed did they go to the police. According to Mead, this hole in Garner's account isn't due to lack of access to the complainants, but a wilful refusal to give due weight to facts she knew about. Whether that's true or not, there are clear grounds for thinking that the students *didn't* go to the police simply out of 'punitiveness'.

A third 'hole' is Garner's failure to grasp the seriousness of what the Master is alleged to have done. I say 'alleged' because of course it hasn't been established beyond reasonable doubt that he did the things he is accused of. It remains possible that Dr Gregory was the victim of a conspiracy as he claims. Or it may well be, as Drusilla Modjeska believes, that 'something happened' that night along the lines of the students' allegations. Assuming that it did, the Master, as Mead says, was not 'just any other bloke to be told to piss off'. As Master, he had a special responsibility of care by virtue of his position. Any action of the sort he is accused of constitutes a serious abuse of his position. As Robert Manne says in his editorial in *Quadrant*, 'if the Master of Ormond, charged as he was with a duty of care over a new generation of undergraduates, did 'as much' as Nicole and Elizabeth allege, it amounted to, surely, more than a mere 'nerdish pass'.

The last 'hole' is the fact that Garner takes a novelist's license to fictionalise Dr Jenna Mead into six or seven different characters. I've seen a suggestion that Garner may have done this for legal reasons, but whatever truth there may be in that, there can be no doubt that it speciously

strengthens the impression in her book of a feminist cabal at Ormond conspiring to bring the Master down.

Well, with so many holes, what's left in *The First Stone* to deserve further discussion? My view is that the book is still important for us to think about partly because it insists on seeing the Ormond affair in explicitly *ethical* terms. What I haven't seen taken up anywhere is the epigraph from Zoe Heller. It says:

The struggle for women's rights is... not a matter of gender loyalty. It is a matter of ethical principle, and as such, it does not dictate automatic allegiance to the women's side in any given argument.

By 'ethical principle' I take it Heller means that feminism matters; it has a moral claim on us, in that it is struggling to achieve certain valuable ends or goods - for example, justice, or equality of rights, recognition or respect. The force of the word 'principle' is that these goods are valuable for everyone, irrespective of gender (or creed or race); they are 'difference-blind' (Charles Taylor). If you believe that these goods are what the struggle is *for*, then you won't *automatically* vote party-line on every issue. There may even be issues in which, on principle, you will cross the floor.

I think there can be no doubt that this is the version of feminism that Garner is espousing. At a certain point Garner reports a conversation with a friend who is arguing that the Master of Ormond is paying for the many other men who have not been caught. 'It's the irony of things,' says the friend, 'that the innocent or nearly-innocent pay for what the guilty have done.' Garner comments: 'Yes, and you can't make an omelette without breaking eggs: what a cruel and ethically rotten argument.' To another acquaintance, who makes a similar argument, Garner says:

'How can this be ethical, that punishment is skewed like this - so that the wrong person carries the can?' She looked at me with a kind of accusing surprise... Once again, I looked hard-hearted, on the wrong team, a turncoat, lacking political passion and solidarity (181-2).

One of the reasons I have quoted from that passage is that it illustrates a crucial distinction in Garner's discussion of these issues, the distinction between the 'ethical' and the 'political'.

Now these are notoriously slippery terms. You don't have to think about them for very long before they start to leach into one another and before long you're bogged in a semantic and conceptual swamp. If I define the discursive space of the ethical as any answer to the question, 'How

should a human being live?', then there is no politics I can think of that doesn't at least imply some answer to that question. In other words, there's no excluding ethics from politics. And equally, since we tend to subscribe these days to the view that 'the personal is political', then it's hard to think of any ethical belief that would count for many of us as entirely politically neutral.

So how can we or Garner separate them? I would suggest that we could do it very provisionally as follows: if the discursive space of ethical is 'How should a human being live?' then it is clear that ethics is centred on goods in a way that's 'difference-blind' across the whole human community. By contrast we might say that in our so-called postmodern era 'politics' has come to mean the organised struggle for power between various groups in society. While this wouldn't have done for Aristotle, the 'political' has to come to be identified in much contemporary discourse, reductively I believe, with the will-to-power of sections of society. Defined in this way, politics is centred precisely on 'difference' - differences of class, gender, race, ethnicity and so on. In these terms, feminism may be seen not as an 'ethical principle' but as a subset of the 'politics of difference', part of the discourse of power...

So the model I'm proposing for the notional separation of ethics and politics is that they are separate discourses, or ways of ploughing the field of experience, one difference-blind, the other focused on difference. It's in this sense that Garner can talk about a clash between her feminism and her ethics. She says:

I had thought of myself as a feminist, and had tried to act like one, for most of my adult life. It shocked me that now, though my experience of the world would usually have disposed me otherwise, I felt so much sympathy for the man in this story and so little for the women. I had a horrible feeling that my feminism and my ethics were speeding towards a head-on smash. I tried to turn on this gut reaction what they call 'a searching and fearless moral inventory'(39).

I'd like to note in passing at this stage just how much Garner's response is based on intuitive *feeling*, what she calls the 'gut reaction' that precedes ethical reflection. I'll return to this point later. By 'ethics' in this passage Garner partly means her intuitive 'sympathy' with the Master. In her talk at the Sydney Institute, she said that she was trying to show 'that it might be possible to admit sympathy in human terms with people on the opposite side of a power divide'.³ I take it that what she means by the phrase 'in human terms' is that 'sympathy', as an *ethical* good, will tend to focus on

another human being simply *as* human being, irrespective of their position in the political picture of differential power-relations.

My view in a nutshell is that *both* perspectives, the ethical *and* the political, are necessary to us if we are to make the fullest sense of our experience either of life or literary texts. The corollary is that neither perspective alone is sufficient. The greatest understanding, in other words, comes from a dialogic, multi-perspective reading, one that doesn't insist on closure in any one set of terms or discourse. My reading of the responses to the Garner controversy is (as I'll try to show) that they have tended on the whole to occlude the ethical, and reassert the political as a master-discourse. I'd also say that that isn't at all surprising, given the epistemic power of political forms of reading over the past 25 years. Part of the contemporary significance of *The First Stone* as a 'moment' in our culture is that it shows the resurgence of explicit ethical discourse. But I'm leaping ahead of myself.

Most of the unfavourable notices of Garner's book have either made the point or taken it for granted that the Ormond events were 'really' or 'essentially' political. This is the line taken by such diverse commentators as Robert Manne in his editorial in *Quadrant* and Jenna Mead in her lecture at the Sydney Institute. Manne says that 'precisely because [Garner's] account of the affair is so non-political' the answers to the central questions she poses are 'unnecessarily obscure'.⁴ Jennifer McDonnell, in her review in *The Canberra Times* (8 April 1995), says that Garner's reading of the Ormond case is 'reductive'. She says 'it was clearly about entrenched institutionalised power.' But there's a form of interpretive closure in McDonnell's own account which is arguably just as reductive: 'Garner's pleas for "kindness" in our dealings with each other... is laudable', she says. 'Unfortunately, sexist institutions do not yield power because women are kind to them and have patiently waited long enough. The only language the status quo understands is money, vote and public embarrassment.' There's an undeniable kernel of truth in that, of course: power will only yield to power. That's why I've said that the political is a necessary perspective. A politics confined to 'pleas for kindness' would amount to political quietism, and Garner certainly isn't seriously proposing that. I think McDonnell only makes this point in order to make Garner's 'pleas for kindness' seem ineffectual, unreal; calling them 'laudable' is really only a species of put-down. A similar put-down is the word 'innocent', used by more than one commentator. A related one is used by Cassandra Pybus in her review when she contrasts hard-headed analysis of the 'issues' to the weight given to the

novelist's indulgent 'feelings'. 'Kindness' and 'sympathy' are soft, not in touch with the 'impersonal' street-wise realities of power.

What hovers over all of this discussion is the bias of the last 25 years in the humanities that says when you talk about power you're talking about things that are *really* real. The corollary of this is that talking about nice, laudable things like 'sympathy' and 'kindness' is either obscuring these really real issues, or worse, by this means actually helping to keep the status quo in power. This has been a very familiar line of argument in the past twenty five years. It is partly Marxist and partly neo-Nietzschean; it's the radical argument that says that the ethical is false consciousness, a species of conservative or patriarchal ideology. Jenna Mead, in her own reading, takes this line when she sees *The First Stone* as

a version of middle-class family romance in which men as fathers rule and are obeyed and flattered by women as mothers. The payoff is that mothers control the daughters by telling them what to do as advice on being feminine... the word for this arrangement is patriarchy.

Whatever the particular merits of Mead's reading, its procedure is to deconstruct Garner's narrative into a political master-narrative about patriarchal power.

Garner in a sense anticipates Mead's response by pointing to a frequent characteristic of this form of master-narrative: it excludes any alternatives to a set of binary oppositions. All that's not directly *opposed* to patriarchal power is in some sense *for* it. 'So the world, to Margaret L,' she writes, 'was divided into harassers and harassed. If one were not completely with her, one was the enemy' (82), or 'part of the nineties onslaught against feminism' (178). What Garner is pointing to here is the totalising and rigidly dualistic pattern of some radical strains of thought, including some forms of feminism, and she is not the only feminist to do so. Drusilla Modjeska, in her short review, makes the key point that to

insist on a dichotomised structure of power - guilty or innocent, victim or abuser - ensures that everyone, including those who have been injured, lose in the struggle to shaft home to *others* the wrong sort of responsibility.

The rigid dichotomy, in other words, figures *others*, those on the other side of the divide, as responsible. Like many other contemporary feminists, such as Jessica Benjamin and Anna Yeatman, Modjeska points to the need to transcend the heavily moralistic ethos of this dualistic mode of thought, to find space for a fuller, more considered response. She argues that it is the

special responsibility of the creative writer, as opposed to the bureaucrat or legislator, 'to stand back from the fray of the moment' precisely to see life more steadily and whole. And an important part of the whole picture, according to her, is Garner's moving presentation of the Master's wife. She says that Garner's 'openness to the complexities' of this woman's situation 'allowed her to write a book on this most thorny subject and offer us a way of *thinking towards* a response that lays down the stone.'

'... thinking towards a response that lays down the stone.' That goes to the very heart of my argument. But like most metaphors it presents uncertainties and ambiguities. What precisely is meant by laying down the stone? Giving up the struggle perhaps? Refusing to blame or to punish wrongdoers? Perhaps in some cases then the stone needs to be cast? The answers to these questions, I'd suggest, lie in the gospel narrative which gives Helen Garner her title. There are, of course, many different ways of approaching that narrative. My own approach is to take it purely as an ethical and literary text. One of the things I mean by this is that I don't interpret the casting of stones as primarily a judicial act, the carrying out of a legal sentence, which indeed it was at the time of this narrative. So I don't see laying down the stone in this context as a refusal *tout court* to pursue a wrongdoer by legal means. So far as I know, this has never been a serious option in any Christian culture. My own approach is to see the woman taken in adultery as a story about *judgmentalism* and about moving beyond it.

The Pharisees' judgmentalism is a rigid adherence to a moral code, a system of clear-cut categories: adultery is wrong, the woman is a sinner. They, by implication, are in the right: they are the righteous, the Law-followers. The code is one of simple and rigid binary differences: good versus evil, right versus wrong. They are within the Law, she is outside, Other, forfeiting her claim to membership of the tribe. Her humanity can therefore be cancelled. In the strongest possible way she is being marginalised, while they affirm their centeredness, their subjectivity, their claim to be the meaning of the moral text. They are also, according to the narrative, power-seeking; they belong to a kind of theocratic New Right trying to trap this revolutionary either into open rejection of the Law or into open rejection of his own teaching. In this sense, they are effectively reactionaries, attempting to enforce Judaic solidarity.

The core of the biblical narrative as I read it is this: Jesus's reply forces the woman's accusers to look into their consciences and admit that they are not simply 'different' from her; they look within themselves and find an

element of *similarity* to her, which convinces them that they do not belong to another moral universe at all. This point needs to be underlined, because Jesus is not simply objecting to judgments of moral 'difference' *per se*; the woman is still guilty of this serious sin, which presumably the Pharisees are not. He is objecting to an ethic of difference that obliterates any sense of common humanity. It is this element of commonness, of human continuity, the fact they are sinners too, that the Pharisees, in the grip of their rigid binary code, appear to have forgotten. Jesus's reply forces them to look within and to recollect two things. First, those traditions within Judaism itself saying that God alone should judge. And secondly the fact that the binary opposition, as the Deconstructionist would say, already exists within themselves: their righteousness already differs from itself.

Judgmentalism, in short, is a form of forgetting, of moral obliviousness. Carl Jung would go further and argue that the Pharisees in this story are externalising their psychic 'shadow' - that is, the darker side of themselves that resists the moral Law by which they try to live. Jung's point is that they can only silence the accusations of the shadow within by projecting them onto some scapegoat beyond themselves. The aim of Jungian therapy here is to bring the patient to embrace all that he or she is, which must include *both* the binary terms in question, the good and the evil, whatever they are. Along the way Jung makes the very incisive point that intense commitment to any good is fraught with psychic danger: 'In the last resort there is no good that cannot produce evil and no evil that cannot produce good.'

The insight at the heart of the gospel narrative, then, is that the route beyond judgmentalism is by way of fuller self-recognition. The Pharisees' laying down the stone signifies a new awareness. We can call this new awareness empathy or 'vicarious introspection' or, as I think the moral philosopher Thomas Nagel might put it, we can say that Jesus's reply opens up an ethical space which is 'intersubjective'. That is, there is a way of recollecting our own subjective lives which is also, by implication, a way of understanding someone else - not simply as an Other, a 'she', but as another subjectivity not altogether discontinuous with our own. I believe that Helen Garner's emphasis on 'kindness' and 'sympathy' is an expression of the same moral intuition, an attempt to open up an intersubjective space large enough to contain figures, such as the Master and his wife, who would sometimes simply be Other to radical feminist analysis; mere representatives of institutional power.

The other main point to be drawn out of this story of the Pharisees is that they no doubt cared about casting stones out of an intense, single-minded and over-riding commitment to a good, the good of justice. Jung's point is that, in structuring the world into clear hierarchies of binary difference, such a thirst for righteousness can produce evil. The same in fact holds for any belief system, be it ethical, religious, or political. It is as true of Marxism or feminism as it is of any theological creed: all can degenerate into dividing the world rigidly into sheep and goats. And all can prosecute the business of searching out the goats, and all the secret ideological hiding places of goatism, with puritanical self-righteousness. What begins as a just project for the proper political recognition of difference sometimes tips over into a zealous intolerance of it. Which I think is the other side of the moral intuition governing *The First Stone*: without a countervailing spirit of 'human-kindness' the single-minded pursuit of sexual justice can descend into judgmentalism - hence Garner's use of words such as 'puritanical', 'legalistic', 'punitive' and 'self-righteous'. One significant fount of all of these is the picture of the Pharisees drawn in the New Testament.

In some respects, in fact, the moral feeling Garner draws on in tapping into this biblical source runs well ahead of the facts. The students concerned in the Ormond case, as we saw, *didn't* go to the police simply out of pharisaical punitiveness or self-righteousness. By the same token, the leaflet circulated anonymously at Ormond concerning the Master certainly suggests that *someone* in the College was prepared to cast stones: It says: '*If Shepherd is not promptly removed, he will commit offences of a similar nature or worse. If attacked by Shepherd, please - do not panic - call the police. There is no guarantee his next crime will not be rape or battery*' (42). Even on the assumption that the Master did everything he was accused of, there's clearly an element of demonisation in this picture of him, something of the 'witch hunt'. On the other hand, many readers feel, myself included, that the witch hunting in *The First Stone* isn't entirely one way.

As a way into that point, I'd like to mention a paper I heard last year by John Docker in which he pointed out the subtle importance given to the Jewishness of the student Garner calls 'Elizabeth Rosen'. Docker's point was that the feminists were associated with a legalism that has caricatured Judaic overtones. One of them reportedly says: 'I'm against people having to go through conciliation before there can be retribution.' 'Retribution?' Garner replies. 'The Old Testament word took my breath away.' She, by contrast, talks of her desire to have 'mercy' (98). 'Dr Shepherd', the fictional name given to Dr Gregory, has obvious Christian overtones, and there is talk of

him being sacrificed for other men's offences, or as a 'goodhearted naïf' who has 'been thrown to the lions' (147). I think that there's an element of truth in other words in Docker's contention that there's a Jewish/Christian binary at the heart of this book. I'd also agree with his implicit point that there are potential dangers in such a binary, dangers which are continuous with those we face if we're tempted to assimilate pharisaism to Judaism, or else if we fail to note that the Pharisees as they are mostly figured in the New Testament are the constructions of a writer with a particular set of ecclesiological and theological designs. Representing the whole truth about the historical Pharisees certainly wasn't one of them. Another way to heed these dangers is to remind ourselves that the Pharisees in the gospel narrative we've been looking at could presumably see Jesus's point because of traditions (which they would have shared with him) of anti-legalism and anti-judgmentalism within Judaism itself. Perhaps the most important reflection we can make, however, is the one made by Hans Kung in *On Being a Christian*: 'But Pharisaism lives on also - and sometimes more so - in Christianity'. (211) The recent film *Priest* makes that point very eloquently.

The reason that 'Pharisaism' does live on is that the very making of moral judgments, as Nietzsche acutely realised, is shadowed by 'Pharisaism'. (Indeed, it's for a closely-related reason that I prefer the word 'judgmentalism'.) I'm sure I don't have to insist to an audience such as this that judgmentalism is there at every turn in the moral life; the very necessity - and it is a necessity - to discriminate in binary terms brings with it the temptation of ranging ourselves on the side of the angels. The forces pulling us this way are part of the condition of being human, especially in the heat of battle for things that really matter. So it's more than a pat irony that Helen Garner, with stone-throwing in her sights, might be justly described by Jennifer McDonnell as herself 'guilty of throwing stones'. She goes on to say: 'The book becomes shrill when the women and their supporters are described as 'puritan feminists', a 'priggish, literal-minded vengeance squad'...'

'The book becomes shrill...' The discernment of different tones of voice and their meanings is a crucial but much undervalued part of critical reading in this over-theoretical moment in our cultural history. My own view is that this capacity is part of what might be termed readerly practical wisdom, and as such begins in feeling, or what Garner calls 'gut reaction'. The importance of feeling, even in philosophy, has recently been brilliantly defended by the American philosopher Martha Nussbaum when she writes

about the 'epistemological value' of feeling; for her, feeling is closely linked to 'our beliefs about how things are and what is important' (*Love's Knowledge*, p. 41). I wouldn't want to be misunderstood as saying something over-simple - feelings, as Nussbaum says, are not 'self-certifying sources of ethical truth' - but they are pointers which our over-cerebral high culture has all too often learned to ignore. If a critic feels the book becoming shrill, and you and I feel it too, then we can talk about sharing a judgment, or a common consciousness, which tells us that Garner herself is beginning to throw stones.

But where does this shared response come from? What is it based on? Certainly I'm not suggesting any essentialist or universalist notion of 'conscience' or of human nature. I may in fact want to affirm some such notion, but it is not entailed in or required by the account I'm presently giving. This is a crucial point for a defence of the ethical in a climate of post-modernist assumptions, for these are the grounds on which ethics and ethical criticism are sometimes dismissed. If we share a judgment about literature or life, then that will be partly culturally or historically constituted. In the present case, the feeling that Garner's tone is becoming shrill and that she is herself becoming judgmental is made possible partly by the fact that we all share an ethical tradition of which the story of the woman taken in adultery is a significant part. In Garner's case, the title of her book makes that explicit, but even if it weren't conscious, the power of the story as a source of moral discrimination would be there in the cultural background as a significant element. The Pharisees are a version of what Alasdair McIntyre calls 'characters': they enable us to articulate an ethical distinction, in this case between the judgmental and the non-judgmental. And what I am suggesting is that they do that even if we make such judgments as it were instinctively, as inarticulate feeling.

The implicit foil to the Pharisees is of course the response of Jesus, which, without denying the woman's sin, is non-judgmental. My point here would be that we inheritors of Judeo-Christian culture are so deeply formed by the rightness and moral profundity of that characteristic response of his, it is so much part of who we are and what we value as good, so basic to what Charles Taylor calls our moral ontology, that we instinctively find literature or art that responds to life in a similar way as deep and balanced and full. 'Consider what we learn from contemplating the characters of Shakespeare and Tolstoy', says Iris Murdoch in *The Sovereignty of Good*. 'What is learnt here is something about the real quality of human nature, when it is envisaged, in the artist's just and compassionate vision, with a

clarity that does not belong to the self-centred rush of ordinary life.' 'Just and compassionate': One very significant source of the value we tend to place on that particular conjunction of qualities, in art as in life, is the figure of Jesus in the gospels.

In talking as I have been I am drawing fairly heavily on the work of Charles Taylor, particularly his magnum opus *Sources of the Self*. Taylor's argument starts with the notion that 'all of us as human agents define ourselves against a background of distinctions of worth'. What he's arguing *against* is both the dominant 'naturalist' or sceptical temper of Anglo-American philosophy as well as the neo-Nietzschean temper of post-modernist theory - both of which tend to present our moral intuitions as mere projections onto a morally-neutral world. An orientation to a good is seen by these sceptics as something like an optional extra that we're free to adopt or reject as we choose. Taylor shows how this notion is *inherently* mistaken by showing that identity, our sense of who are, is a kind of 'orientation in moral space'. To be without any evaluative framework at all would involve a profound psychic disorientation; such a person would not simply be morally shallow or unpredictable, he or she would be frighteningly disturbed, perhaps pathological. For a person of relative normality the sceptical picture *cannot* obtain, simply on the grounds that such a person must be oriented in terms of the multiple evaluative distinctions needed to answer for herself in everyday life.

Taylor also rejects the sort of Foucaultian argument I talked about earlier, which recognises rightly that *some* visions of good may be connected to certain forms of domination, but wrongly infers from this that *all* views of the good are simply enterprises of domination. Taylor says, as he argues against Foucault: 'This would be to fail to recognise how one's own position is powered by a vision of the good.' (100) This is a key idea of Taylor's: it's possible to live by goods we fail to acknowledge or even to recognise. Indeed his argument is that modern thought on the whole obscures many of the goods we actually live by, and he sees his task as working through what he calls layers of modern suppression in order to recover these goods from a kind of 'naturalistic bewitchment'. Part of the problem has been that natural science, with its immense modern prestige, has encouraged us to ignore our own anthropocentric reactions, including significantly our own spontaneous moral feelings and pre-articulate gut reactions. 'My perspective', says Taylor, 'is defined by the moral intuitions I have, by what I am morally moved by.' (73) *Moral* intuitions are the basis of

practical reason, which consists partly in articulating the moral point of the actions our intuitions enjoin on us, or present as admirable (78).

Being articulate about the good is important for Taylor. 'We aren't full human beings,' he says echoing Plato, 'until we can say what moves us, what our lives are built around.' Articulating the good can bring it closer as a moral source. The 'moral source' is another key notion: it is something the love of which empowers us to do and be good. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, for example, the supreme good is God, his *agape* for us and ours for him. However, the stories about God and images of him in the Bible remain something of a moral source even for many of our contemporaries who have abandoned the theological and philosophical doctrines surrounding them. For example, the Exodus story has inspired several secular revolutionary and liberationist movements. 'Even where the theology is lost, the story marches on.' This is because seeing one's life in the pattern of the Exodus story still 'carries tremendous moral power.' (95) This of course was the case I was arguing about the story of the woman taken in adultery.

Taylor sees the job of tracing the sources of the ideas we moderns find morally empowering as an historical undertaking. 400 out of the 500 or so pages of *Sources of the Self* are devoted to an analysis - it's simply breathtaking in its breadth of reference - which traces the spiritual visions and sources denied by modern theories but which still unconsciously inform them. What this history mainly consists of is the story of how one vision of the good gives way to another. It's an extremely complex evolutionary story, in which certain extremely powerful visions of the good, called 'hypergoods', tend to supersede earlier pictures of the good, often assimilating features of the goods they supersede. Platonism swallows heroic morality, Christianity swallows Platonism, Enlightenment notions of detached reason, universal justice and benevolence swallow Christianity before they are swallowed in turn by post-modern, neo-Nietzschean theories. However, as you'll already realise, that's too simple. 'The older condemned goods remain; they resist; some seem ineradicable from the human heart.' (65).

Now that's the nub of my argument. The goods we live by are in conflict with each other. The Enlightenment-derived demands of equal and universal respect and self-determining freedom which are some of the sources of feminism inevitably conflict with older goods of community, friendship and traditional identity - the sacrifice of which may bring consequences that seem 'utterly unacceptable' (101). Taylor's startling claim

is that 'we are and cannot but be on both sides of the great intramural debates' of our culture, 'between the espousal of hypergoods and the defence of those goods which are to be sacrificed in their name.' (105) 'We cannot but be on both sides...' What can this mean? Taylor's argument is that if we pursue one good at the expense of all others, we are likely to end up with an evil. For example, Nazism might be seen as pursuing the single good of nationalism at the price of all else. Taylor concludes: 'following a single good to the end may be catastrophic, not because it isn't a good, but because there are others which can't be sacrificed without evil.' (503) In the present case, just because some radical forms of feminism, if pursued single-mindedly, can lead to judgmental stone-throwing, doesn't invalidate sexual justice as a good. Nor is Garner's 'sympathy' worthless simply because a single-minded ethic of that kind might tend to entrench injustice. We can't without loss forego either good. They are part of the full 'range of goods we live by' - and need to live by, consciously and articulately, if we're to live as well as we can.

REFERENCES

- ¹ *The Australian*, 9 August 1995, p. 11.
- ² *Campus Review*, April 20, 1995, pp. 7-8.
- ³ *The Australian*, 9 August 1995, p. 11.
- ⁴ *Quadrant*, May, 1995, p. 3.