

One-day workshop, Atlantic Moderation: Programme and Abstracts

Friday, 4 March 2011

IASH, Hope Park Square

Programme

9.15 am: Welcome, Introductions

9.30 - 11.00 am: Panel 1

Mark Robson (University of Nottingham), 'Performing moderation in the Renaissance'

Michael F. Graham (University of Akron) "Sectarian Discourse in the Cause of Moderation: Reginald Scot and Demonological Scepticism"

11.00 - 11.30 am: Coffee

11.30 am - 1.00 pm: Atlantic Moderation

Catherine Packham (University of Sussex), 'Scottish Moderates and the Atlantic World'

Andrew Taylor (University of Edinburgh), "'Men are conservative after dinner': Emerson, Montaigne and radical moderatism"

1.00 - 2.00 pm Lunch

2.00 - 3.30 pm: Liberalisms and Moderatisms

Áine Kelly (University of Edinburgh) "Moderate Polemics: The Provocations of Richard Rorty"

Alexandre Guilherme (University of Edinburgh), "The Contrasting Philosophies of Martin Buber and Frantz Fanon: The political as dialogue or as confrontation"

3.30 - 4.00 pm Break

4.00 - 5.00 pm Roundtable discussion

5.00 - 6.00 pm Reception

Abstracts

Michael F. Graham (University of Akron) "Sectarian Discourse in the Cause of Moderation: Reginald Scot and Demonological Scepticism"

Exceptional figures (such as Montaigne or Erasmus) aside, the sixteenth century, with its sharp religious divisions and aggressive persecution of nonconformists, real or imagined, has not been regarded as an age of moderation. Contestants in the battle of ideas claimed moderation by grounding their viewpoints in their own particular society's orthodoxy, which was often marked by the aggressive denunciation of the orthodoxies of others. To modern ears, such viewpoints seem remarkably immoderate. But this perception, grounded in modern western associations of moderation with tolerance of other views, can obscure the actual positions being argued by sixteenth century contestants. The aggressive persecution of the imaginary crime of witchcraft seems, from a modern perception, one of the most immoderate aspects of sixteenth century culture, followed closely on the league table of immoderation by the literature of religious controversy. But Reginald Scot, one of the sixteenth century's two major witchcraft sceptics, expropriated the language of religious polemic in his countercultural dismantling of the witchcraft beliefs of his contemporaries, thus employing conventional (immoderate) discourse to argue for the moderation of the pursuit of witches. This paper will explore this aspect of Scot's eclectic polemic, which is particularly interesting in light of doubts which have recently been cast on Scot's own religious orthodoxy.

Alexandre Guilherme (University of Edinburgh), "The Contrasting Philosophies of Martin Buber and Frantz Fanon: The political as dialogue or as confrontation"

There are many who advocate *dialogue* and *peace talks* as avenues to be pursued (e.g. Obama; "So we face big and difficult challenges. And what the American people hope – what they deserve – is for all of us, Democrats and Republicans, to work through our differences") and there are just as many who defend a *confrontational* attitude as a way of dealing with the situation (e.g. Bush: "you're either with us, or against us"). Both of these schools of thought appear to defend such views either as something that ought to be done *pragmatically* or because *common sense* demands it, and consequently these views become *philosophically* unsatisfactory. That said, it is evident that the 'political' takes these two distinct forms: either dialogue or confrontation. The questions here are: How are we to philosophically ground these two perspectives? How are we to decide which is more philosophically sound? How do they relate to the 'rhetorics of moderation'? In answering these questions I claim that 'dialogue' is epitomised by the philosophy of Martin Buber and 'confrontation' by the philosophy of Frantz Fanon; moreover, I claim that the former embodies 'moderation' and the latter challenges it. In my analysis, I refer to Buber and Fanon's respective philosophies to demonstrate my point; I advocate the dangers of not pursuing 'dialogue' and 'moderation'; and I conclude that Buber and Fanon remain relevant for our modern times by way of referring to modern 'political' examples.

Áine Kelly (University of Edinburgh) "Moderate Polemics: The Provocations of Richard Rorty"

Richard Rorty occupies a unique disciplinary position, somewhere between philosophy, literary criticism and cultural politics. The elements of humour and informality which characterize his writing combine with a self-consciously American idiom to voice a rhetoric of reasonableness and common sense, a voice Rorty considers singularly appropriate for the pragmatist intellectual. This paper aims to explore in detail this rhetoric of neo-pragmatism. By "rhetoric", I mean to suggest both the persuasive force of Rorty's writing and the figural dimensions of his prose.

Famously contending that philosophy is not delimited by subject matter or genre but is "a kind of writing", Rorty wishes to view philosophy as a mode of discourse that amounts to re-describing and narrating the history of philosophy. The very fact that these rhetorical perspectives ("writing", "style", "re-description", "narrative" and so forth) are so privileged encourages us to consider the possibly figurative aspect of Rorty's own writing, the metaphorical investments that make his critical position possible as well as the literary dimensions of his prose. The key question, of course, is whether these rhetorical perspectives are *constitutive* of his writing; whether Rorty's style, in fact, is as important as he claims.

Dr. Catherine Packham (University of Sussex) 'Cicero's ears: rhetoric, moderation, and the sublime in Enlightenment Scotland'

Enlightenment Scotland witnessed a resurgent interest in rhetoric as part of its newly formulated Science of Man. Philosophers, including David Hume and Adam Smith, turned their attention to written and spoken language use, in all their forms, both to understand this crucial area of human activity, and – in line with Enlightenment concerns – to improve it. This paper explores Hume and Smith's discussions of eloquence, oratory and rhetoric, and in particular their attention to forms of linguistic or oratorical extremes, including the sublime. It argues that for both thinkers, the realm of the aesthetic poses both the problem of the excessive in human nature, and the possibility of its moderation. It discusses attempts by Hume and Smith to theorise accounts of self-moderating

mechanisms in human nature and society, by which moderation in rhetoric, character and politics might be secured.

Andrew Taylor (University of Edinburgh) “Men are conservative after dinner”: Emerson, Montaigne and radical moderatism

The philosopher Susan Haack published a collection of essays in 1998 entitled *Manifesto of a Passionate Moderate*. The book is, indeed, a strong articulation of its author's beliefs on matters ranging from feminism to multiculturalism to the literary turn (via Richard Rorty) of her discipline. The apparently oxymoronic phrase “passionate moderate”, while undefined in her text, gets discursive purchase through Haack's sense of herself as battling the current thinking on race, gender and aspects of philosophical activity more generally. Her radicalism *and* her moderatism lie in a resistance to what she sees as the fashionable – and philosophically dangerous – preoccupations of her subject. What, then, does it mean to be passionately – or radically – moderate? For Haack, the performance of her moderatism is what can radically counter what she regards as some of philosophy's faddish absurdities. Moderation can act as a check on excess while still proudly exhibiting the strength of its advocacy. In this paper I want to think through the counter-intuitive possibilities of a radical moderatism by offering a reading of Ralph Waldo Emerson's essay (published in *Representative Men* in 1850) on Michel de Montaigne, whose own essay ‘On Moderation’ is a key text on the topic. Emerson's moderate credentials, I want to suggest, are radical in their refusal to form exclusive alliances, a discursive hesitancy embodied in a style which constantly qualifies or undercuts itself in a resistance to settled thought. If one definition of classic moderatism is the desire to adjudicate between positions, to find common ground, to reach a settlement, Emerson's radicalism lies in his reluctance to choose, or at least in his desire to maintain an openness to the possibility of further consideration of a subject. ‘Montaigne’ is a complex meditation on the role of scepticism in the production of thought, and of the conditions that might be necessary for thinking to retain its validity in the face of the false comforts of extremism. Emerson maintains a sometimes precarious balance between scepticism and belief, keen to argue against our craving for easy certainty (the stance we lazily slip into, he suggests, after a good meal) and yet also holding onto the notion that the abandonment of belief is a human impossibility. The essay treads between and around these positions, in itself reluctant to close a dialectic whose very existence speaks to Emerson's commitment to a moderatism that, in the words of Virginia Woolf (writing about Montaigne), follows the mind's “own vagaries, giving the whole map, weight, colour, and circumference of the soul in its confusion, its variety, its imperfection”.