

In Memoriam: Colin Murray Turbayne

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Colin Murray Turbayne died on May 16, 2006 in Queensland, Australia after a full and productive life of 90 years. He was cremated and his ashes scattered in the ocean by his sons, as was done in the same place with his wife Ailsa's remains in 1992. They were married for fifty-one years. They were very much in love, and after her death in 1992 Murray mourned her until his own passing. The Turbaynes have two boys, Ron and John, and two grandchildren, who survive them. His father, David Livingstone Turbayne was a banker, and his mother, Alice Eva Rene Lahey was a descendant of one of Queensland's pioneer families.



Turbayne's early education was at the Church of England Grammar School in Brisbane, where he distinguished himself as a cricketer and was Head Prefect. He earned a B.A. at the University of Queensland and his M.A. from the same institution in 1946. During World War II he served as MacArthur's chief of staff for Australian Intelligence in several Pacific theatres. He married Ailsa Krimmer in 1940, and they emigrated to the United States in 1947. In 1950, Turbayne received his doctorate in Philosophy from the University of Pennsylvania and became Assistant Professor at the University of Washington, and then at UC Berkeley. In 1957 he moved to the University of Rochester where he remained until his retirement as Professor Emeritus in 1981.

During his tenure at Rochester he was a Fulbright Fellow, a Guggenheim Fellow and an NEH Senior Fellow. He also was awarded various grants. He and Ailsa established the International Berkeley Prize, which is administered by the University of Rochester. I met Professor Turbayne and his lovely wife Ailsa when I became a doctoral student at the University of Rochester in 1960. He became my dissertation advisor, and I served as his graduate assistant. Years later as president of Bowling Green State University I had the pleasure of conferring an honorary doctoral degree of Humane Letters upon him.

Turbayne was a widely respected scholar. His *The Myth of Metaphor* (Yale UP, 1962) is a centrally important read for anyone wishing to understand the nature of philosophical and scientific explanation. Its major thesis is that the Newtonian interpretation of the universe as a machine rests upon a mistake, a “sort-crossing” in which a useful explanatory metaphor, the machine model, has been taken literally. Turbayne argues that although the machine model/metaphor is useful, it should not be taken as a true description. There are other models which are, for some purposes, even better. He describes the “language model” and shows how it can explain certain natural phenomena which cannot be explained by Newton’s mechanics, including the Barrovian case, the inverted retinal image, and the case of the horizontal moon. Turbayne’s many works about George Berkeley made him one of the leading interpreters of that great man’s theories, especially his theories of vision and relative motion. He produced six major editions of Berkeley’s works, and wrote many articles about him and his relationships to the thought of other great thinkers, such as Hume and Kant. His last major work *Metaphors for the Mind: The Creative Mind and Its Origins*, was published in 1990.

Murray was the best teacher I ever witnessed. He loved to perform and had a wonderful sense of humor. He frequently received standing ovations from the students in his classes, particularly when illustrating philosophical points by performing Shakespearian scenes to illustrate them. Those who knew him will recall with a smile his use of the “Is this a dagger that I see before me...” scene from *Macbeth*, performed with actual cloak and dagger, to illustrate a point about metaphors. In seminars and individual sessions he was the perfect Socratic interrogator, drawing the student irresistibly to the correct conclusions. He was a master of the *reductio*.

He and his family were utterly without pretense. They once visited me on a remote island I owned in Northern Ontario, and each morning, rain or shine, the entire family, nude, would plunge into the lake and like a line of ducks, paddle around the island. Murray did have a quirky side. He once went “walkabout” with the aborigines and from them picked up the habit of occasionally purging himself of harmful bodily fluids. He did this by going on one month diets in which he ate nothing but grapes. He swore that this sharpened the mind and invigorated the body. Murray loved tennis and played it very well. He enjoyed reviewing the matches of the Australian tennis greats like Laver and Rose.

I once told him that I had asked Roderick Chisholm if he thought there was one philosophical question more important than any other. He replied, “Why of course: whether God exists.” Murray agreed with him. If the mind does survive bodily death, as Murray’s beloved Bishop Berkeley believed, the thought that Murray might now know the answer pleases me greatly. The world is a poorer place without him.

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