



Wendell Berry's Virtues of Renewal: Teaching the Forms that Sustain Life and Community with Dr. Jeffrey Bilbro

Lecture 5: Hope

Outline:

Given the limitations of efficiency-driven solutions for global problems, Dr. Jeffrey Bilbro offers Wendell Berry's eschatological vision of the redemptive work of hope as a meaningful alternative.

Pessimism and Optimism

- **Big Numbers and Global Problems:**
 - Political and cultural discourse often focuses on large-scale statistics (e.g., climate change, education, etc.).
 - **Pessimistic View:**
 - Individuals feel powerless in the face of such vast problems.
 - Actions become symbolic or insignificant (e.g., energy-efficient lightbulbs).
 - **Optimistic View:**
 - Hopes are placed in large institutional or technological solutions (e.g., UN agreements, geoengineering).
 - Both views agree that individual actions have minimal impact.

An Eschatological Vision of Hope

- **Berry's Third Way:**
 - Rejects both pessimism and optimism.
 - **Hope in Redemption:** Focus on good work, regardless of its measurable impact.



- **Eschatological Vision:** Redemption is an ultimate promise that allows individuals to act meaningfully now, without expecting to "fix" global issues.
- **Tension Between Ideal and Real:**
 - Hope lies in living out acts of healing and love that reflect the Kingdom of God, even though they won't bring about the eschaton.

Efficacy: A Misleading Standard

- **Critique of Efficacy:**
 - Modern society's obsession with **scalable solutions** and quantifiable results diminishes the value of individual actions.
 - **Pseudoinefficacy:** Helping one person seems insignificant compared to the global scale of problems.
- **Hope Beyond Efficacy:**
 - Hopeful actions should be based on care for individuals, not their ability to create systemic change.
 - Actions like helping a refugee or a student are valuable, even if they don't "solve" global crises like climate change or education gaps.

The Redemptive Work of Hope

- **Good Work in the Present:**
 - Berry's vision of hope encourages present action, grounded in love and care.
 - Hope is not about predicting or controlling the future, but about doing the right thing now.
- **King Lear's Servants as Models:**
 - The faithful service of Kent, Edgar, and Cordelia embodies redemptive hope, even in a tragic setting.
 - Their actions demonstrate the value of humble service, which may not lead to immediate success but sustains hope.

Faithful Service as a Practice of Hope

- **King Lear as an Example:**
 - The servants in *King Lear* demonstrate that hope lives in sacrificial service, even when no grand victory is achieved.
 - This kind of service is not about achieving large-scale change but about remaining faithful and loving.



- **Serving Where Condemned:**
 - Berry uses Kent's banishment in *King Lear* as an allegory for the human condition: serving in a broken world without expecting to fix everything.

Models not Metrics

- **Danger of Metrics:**
 - Modern society's reliance on data and predictions can lead to despair when models fail to solve problems.
 - **Hope Through Models:**
 - Instead of chasing metrics, hope can be fostered by focusing on models of good work (e.g., a particular artist or community).
 - These models serve as examples to emulate, not as metrics to meet.
 - **Berry's Conclusion:**
 - Hope involves participating in the present good—living out redemption now, without needing assurance of future success.
-

