

## 628 - LECTURE

# POSTMODERNISM & UTOPIA: AN UNHOLY ALLIANCE

### I. WHAT IS POSTMODERNISM

#### A. So we've spent some time picking on modernism

1. Today we begin considering the consequences
2. And the Alternatives
3. Turns out they aren't so good.

#### B. Recall the Modern Period

1. Major figures: Descartes, Berkeley, Hume, Kant and pretty much all the philosophy that has been done since then.
2. Characterized by:
  - a) **AN INCLUSION OF ALL EDUCATED PEOPLE IN THE PHILOSOPHICAL CONVERSATION.**
  - b) **THREE WORDS TYPIFY THE BASIC MODE OF THE MODERN PHILOSOPHICAL PROJECT: REASON, NATURE AND PROGRESS**
3. Reason:
  - a) **THERE IS A MOVE TO FOCUS ON "REASON" AS OPPOSED TO RELIGION**
  - b) **INVESTED INSTEAD IN A DEDUCTIVE SYSTEM OF TRUTHS THAT COULD GIVE INFORMATION ABOUT THE WORLD**
  - c) **SUBJECTIVE FACTORS—LIKE EMOTION AND RELIGION—ARE ELIMINATED**
  - d) **OBJECTIVITY—ABSENCE OF BIAS—IS ATTAINED**
  - e) **SEEK UNIVERSAL, NECESSARY, IMPERSONAL TRUTHS**
    - (1) This means that the truths holds no matter what your religious commitments, no matter what the circumstances of the world.
    - (2) The truths are necessary because it is commonly believed that once personal bias is removed and universality is achieved the truth of the matter could not possibly be any other way.
4. Nature:
  - a) **THE SCIENTIFIC MOVEMENT OF THE RENAISSANCE TAKES COMMAND OF THE CULTURE**
  - b) **THE WORLD IS UNDERSTOOD AS A MACHINE**
  - c) **THE WORLD IS UNDERSTOOD AS DYNAMIC SYSTEM WITH AN INTELLIGIBLE STRUCTURE THAT CAN BE EXPRESSED THROUGH MATHEMATICS**
5. Progress:
  - a) **THE FEELING OF THE TIME IS THAT WE AS INDIVIDUALS AND AS A SPECIES ARE IN A FORWARD MOMENTUM**

- b) **WE WILL HAVE GREATER KNOWLEDGE AND BETTER LIVES THROUGH INVESTIGATIONS THAT WILL ENRICH OUR KNOWLEDGE AS WELL AS OUR INDIVIDUAL LIVES.**

6. This conception of the world still exists today.

**C. Postmodernism takes up many of the critiques Mills makes.**

1. Inclusion

- a) **NOT EVEN CLOSE**
- b) **NOT WOMEN, PEOPLE OF COLOR, THE ILLITERATE, THE POOR, NON-CHRISTIANS, GAY, GYPSYS AND ON AND ON AND ON**
- c) **POSTMODERNISM ARGUES THAT THE WAY MODERNISM PURSUES “INCLUSION” IS DESTINED TO FAILURE.**

- (1) Because they search for a paradigm trait or characteristic to define humanity in history.
- (2) Real inclusion will cease to attempt to define the human experience or the human character in terms of one ideal.

2. Reason

a) **REMOVE SUBJECTIVE FACTORS — LIKE RELIGION OR EMOTION**

- (1) Unseat God as the definitive factor for all knowledge and understanding

*(a) This only works if nothing arises to take its place*

*(b) Science did.*

*(c) It did not just become a tool for pursuing knowledge*

*(d) It became the new “G\_d”*

*(e) A dominant force in determining what is and isn't knowledge*

- (2) Emotion was equated with subjectivity (rightly) and bias (why)

*(a) While it is true that emotion is necessarily a subjective response*

*(b) It is not so clear that it is necessarily a biased one.*

*(c) My caring and my investment in an issue cannot in and of itself make me unfit to rationally consider that issue.*

*(d) If it did, it seems no one could ever*

b) **OBTAIN OBJECTIVITY**

- (1) What is objectivity?

- (2) Even if you are a white guy you have a perspective

*(a) However to a large degree this was assumed and “made” false.*

*(b) The white, male, heterosexual, Christian, class privileged perspective becomes the idealized “norm”*

- (3) Once this perspective becomes normalized every other perspective becomes “biased” by comparison.

c) **UNIVERSAL, NECESSARY, IMPERSONAL TRUTHS**

- (1) If they are not truly objective...

- (2) If they replace one bias with another...

(3) Then, by definition, this goal cannot be met.

**d) POSTMODERNISM TAKES THIS SET OF CHARACTERISTICS TO ITS MOST EXTREME CONSEQUENCES.**

(1) There can be no objectivity.

*(a) No objective truth, or objective reality*

*(b) Instead what we have are subtle norms*

*(c) They allow us to more or less successfully manipulate our world.*

*(d) Incredulity toward metanarratives — those stories that pose as the story. With a guiding principle that is supposed to make all the world exposed, explained and compliant.*

(2) Do not make the agent/subject an abstract thing. √√√

*(a) There is no essence*

*(b) There is no central trait*

*(c) We are different and changing all the time*

*(d) These combine to form a sublime community (utopia)*

(3) All is competing subjectivities.

(4) Moral/Political projects are competitions between ideologies.

3. Nature

**a) AGAIN WE SEE HERE THE NEW DOMINATION OF SCIENCE REPLACING THE OLD DOMINATION OF RELIGION**

**b) WHY SHOULD WE BELIEVE THAT ALL THERE IS TO KNOW ABOUT THE WORLD IS OBSERVABLE BY OUR MEAGRE SENSES?**

**c) POSTMODERNISM ALSO TAKES THIS CRITIQUE TO ITS FARTHEST CONCLUSION**

(1) Science is just another competing paradigm

(2) It has no more validity than any other system of understanding.

4. Progress

**a) HERE IS THE MOST HYPOCRITICAL OF ALL THE GOALS OF MODERNISM**

**b) PROGRESS IS PROGRESS FOR A FEW: MEN, THE WHITE,**

**c) EVERYONE ELSE IS GETTING JUST THE DREGS OF PROGRESS**

**d) EVEN TODAY MILLIONS OF PEOPLE IN THE WORLD DO NOT BENEFIT FROM ALL OUR “ADVANCES”**

**e) THE CONCERN IS THAT ONLY A FEW WERE MEANT TO.**

**f) WHILE WE PROGRESS TECHNOLOGICALLY; OUR SOCIAL/POLITICAL/MORAL LIFE HAS STAGNATED.**

**g) POSTMODERNISM ARGUES THAT THERE CAN BE NO MORE PROGRESS**

(1) Modern theories are typically moving toward a utopia that occurs when whatever the guiding principle may be comes to its fullest possibilities

(2) Of course those theories are inaccurate

(3) So for postmodernism utopia is the just presence of multiple theories.

#### **D. Modernism & Utopia**

1. Moderns chase utopia
2. If we just see clearly and distinctly, through the lens of class, with rationality, with our virtuous soul we will come to good.

#### **E. The Arrival of the Postmodern**

1. We have our Mills critiques
2. We have people like me who say I'm black; I'm white and aren't confused and aren't trying to resolve it.
3. We have people performing race, performing gender, performing sexuality.
4. Descriptive discourse
5. It uniqueness
  - a) **NOT IN REJECTION UNIVERSAL RULES OF THOUGHT**
  - b) **OR REJECTION OF HISTORICAL SUBJECTS**
  - c) **BUT THE END OF HISTORY**
    - (1) Belief that the idea(l) of inevitable progress is discredited
    - (2) Belief that models of the world in which the nature of the subject is realized are now delegitimated.
  - d) **WHAT THE HELL DOES THAT MEAN?**
    - (1) Subject's nature
    - (2) Progress
  - e) **THIS IS THE POSTMODERN UTOPIA**
    - (1) We're here playing our roles
    - (2) Switching our roles
    - (3) Drawing from and a reflecting upon a myriad of descriptive discourses.
6. We have rejected utterly the subtle authoritarianism of all meta-narratives as well as the oppression that inevitably results from them.
  - a) **WE EMBRACE MARGINALIZED WAYS OF THINKING**
  - b) **AND DIFFERENTIATED SUBJECTS**
  - c) **WITH THEIR OWN UNIQUE AGENCY**

## **II. SO WHERE IS IT TAKING US**

**A. We spent all this time spanking modernism, but...what's the alternative**

**B. Are we prepared to give...?**

1. Truth, moral and scientific
2. Legitimate struggle
3. "Racism is Bad."
4. A Subject, a composite self

**C. Are we free to recognize...**

1. Racism in postmodern narratives
2. Status quo legitimation
3. An identity

**D. The neighborhoods of New York/Chicago etc. are not a mall.**

1. Not a community of free and equal participants
2. In the postmodern utopia someone still has to lose and permanently at a loss. There is not competing discourse
3. Why should postmodern "meta-prescriptive" necessarily recommend a condemnation of either capitalism or unnecessary misery?
4. Save the drama for your mama
  - a) NORMAL SCIENCE
  - b) REJECTION OF HARMS, UNNECESSARY MISERY
  - c) SIMMA DOWN NAH

**E. Same old story**

1. Postmodernism presupposes the composite self it rejects.
2. And it presupposes a white, privileged appreciant of the postmodern utopia.