

## Comments on postmodernism and ideology

### Postmodernism

In the roundup for 11 April we summarised and provided a link to an [article by Helen Pluckrose](#), critical of postmodernism.

#### Response from Teow Loom Ti

The last part of your Saturday roundup about an article by Helen Pluckrose caught my attention. I clicked onto the article written by Pluckrose and read, with increasing despair, her tearing to shreds of Postmodernism, sometimes using examples that trivialise a profound philosophy, often disrespectfully towards its originators. That she is able to do that rests on her opening paragraph which says, “This is partly because postmodernists rarely explain themselves clearly and partly because of the inherent contradictions and inconsistencies of a way of thought which denies stable reality or reliable knowledge to exist.” This allows her to build up a cogent argument against postmodernism often by citing examples which ridicule the underlying concepts.

If anyone doubts the difficulty of establishing “reality”, just take the example of the recent George Pell trials. Although evidence was presented, ultimately it is the human judgement, often in contradiction with each other, that enables us to come to a decision on what we believe to be the “truth”. The question is, how can an imperfect human mind come up with truths or reality except in a relative sense? Some things are truer than others because there is more empirical evidence from science or mathematics to support it. Even science itself is as good as the next new theory that throws out the existing one. No good scientist will ever tell you that they have the absolute truth. Pluckrose cleverly uses the expression “reliable knowlege”, and “stable reality” because underlying all that clever argument, she herself is not convinced that there is an absolute truth or reality. Only one that we can “rely” on and is “stable”.

The Enlightenment got us out of Medieval thinking; but science itself can be misused; as can Postmodernism. Just think of Social Darwinism as an example. The Postmodernist solution to the wrong use of science is an exhortation to examine our assumptions. What is wrong with that?

Ultimately, does the “truth” lie with God? In answering this question, we have to take a huge leap of faith to believe the “truth” that God exists.

### Ideology

Then on 18 April we summarised and provided a link to [an article by John Warhurst](#) in praise of ideology.

This drew the following responses:

#### Teow Loon Ti

Your section “In Praise of Ideology” sent alarm bells ringing in my head. With all due respects to John Warhurst, I am afraid that I find it hard to accept that competing ideologies are good for us. I have always thought that “ideologies” are the roots of all our problems. Firstly, to define ideology I would refer to the Macquarie Dictionary which says “the body of doctrine, myth and symbols of a social movement, institution, class, or large group”. From

this one could infer that ideologies defy the passage of time and the change of circumstance. They are deeply seated, culturally derived, ideas which Mr Warhurt himself says are 'deeply rooted in us'. Two of the most frightful, and all pervasive, groups of ideologies are religious and political ones. Just think of Communist ideologies or Fundamental Islamic ideologies. When they extend ideological conflicts to an armed one, they give and have given, humankind no end of problems.

Just to elaborate, the ideologies embedded in ISIS's struggle date from the 7th century AD. Its advocates live physically in the 21st century but harbours 7th century ideologies about the "ideal state" based on the Prophet's teachings. Such ideologies defy both the passage of time and circumstance.

Communism for instance views the world from a struggle for hegemony between the wealthy and the poor with no latitude for compromise. It was spawned at a time, i.e. the 19th century industrial revolution in Europe, when working and living conditions for the workers were horrible. Today, even the remaining Marxism driven countries, China and Russia, have embraced capitalism. Marxism was considered by its creator as "scientific socialism". For this very reason, we have to thank the Postmodernists for seeing through the folly of such extreme ideologies, telling us that the truth is relative. They do not mean, by saying that truth is relative, that any silly idea has equal standing with carefully research and verified ones.

### **Sue Caldwell**

Here is a very postmodern statement: There are more things in heaven and earth Horatio, than are dreamt in your philosophy.

Perhaps it is possible to deeply understand the truth (or otherwise) of any proposition. Patanjali recommended such a discipline or way in his Yoga Sutras. He recommended and practiced a yogic technique of Samyama which is a process of one-pointed and ultimately thoughtless concentration and exhaustive contemplation of any particular object, function, person, process, or condition, until the essence or ultimate obviousness of that subject became clear. Only in that case does the enquirer enjoy native intimacy and understanding, or power, relative to that subject.

At another level the story/parable of Humpty Dumpty points out once haven "fallen" from the intrinsically native position of wholeness or Cosmic Unity, to the position of seeing reality through the prism of a shattered fragment lying on the ground it is totally impossible to put Humpty back together again, or to see any and everything with total clarity.

Another metaphor: we are like tiny stick figures running around on the tip of an iceberg, at least four fifths of which is submerged (hidden) in water. From that tiny perspective we can hardly perceive most of reality. All of our philosophy, conjectures and world-views are based upon and limited to such a narrow stick like perspective.

### **Gavin O'Brien**

I agree with your philosophy Teow Loon Ti. I like to think back to the great philosophers of ancient times. They might not have got it right all the time, but at least their thoughts have come down to us to consider. I wonder how much of today's philosophy will still be around in a thousand years, assuming of course that we are still here.