

Postmodernism

As a theory postmodernism has often been defined ambiguously for various reasons: the deliberate attempt of its intelligentsia to avoid the neat closure of definitions; its application over a wide range of seemingly unrelated disciplines (academic and theoretic disciplines such as political science, organization theory, cultural studies, philosophy of science, economics, linguistics, architecture, feminist theory, and literary criticism, as well as art movements in fields such as literature and music); and the appearance of different and sometimes contradictory definitions that have been used over time with varying levels of disagreement between postmodernist scholars. Accepting this indefinability as a truism, The Stanford Encyclopedia attempts to describe postmodernism as "a set of critical, strategic and rhetorical practices employing concepts such as difference, repetition, the trace, the simulacrum, and hyper reality to destabilize other concepts such as presence, identity, historical progress, epistemic certainty, and the univocity of meaning."¹

Generally speaking, postmodernism is characterized by irreverence, self-reflexivity, incomprehensibility, irony and cynicism. In philosophy it manifests as post-structuralism, anti-foundationalism, pragmatism, decline of metaphysics and the growing divide between analytic philosophy and continental philosophy. In politics it is reflected in identity politics, nihilism, anarchism, political correctness, and the erosion of unifying narratives and their replacement by a plurality of localised narratives. In critical theory it emphasizes deconstruction, relativism, power dynamics and importantly the viewing of pre-modern and early modern traditions from the perspective of historically marginalized and opposed identities. Postmodern arts feature bricolage, the use of text prominently as the central artistic element, collage, simplification, appropriation, performance art, the recycling of past styles and themes in a modern-day context, as well as the break-up of the barrier between fine and high arts and low art and popular culture. Similarly, a wide array of features characterizes the myriad other disciplines where postmodernism applies.

The philosophical basis of postmodernism arose in the 1970s, originating principally in continental Europe especially France, for which reason it has also been termed the French theory. Postmodern theorists such as Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Jean-François Lyotard, Jean Baudrillard, and others challenged the traditional Anglo-American academic discourses that followed the modernity principles of the Enlightenment and proposed alternate critical readings of various texts in an attempt to present a more nuanced and unoppressive understanding of reality. Although these postmodern theorists did not constitute a unified school, they were unified by a critical attitude towards truth emerging from the assumption that all knowledge is partial and local; by the conception that the dominant narrative is constructed by the elites and serves their power interests; and by the influence of earlier thinkers, prominently Nietzsche, Kierkegaard and Heidegger. Importantly, Derrida, Foucault, Lyotard all began their academic careers as Marxists.

The rise of postmodernism, specifically in France, also needs to be understood in the historical context that it developed. The post-war French intellectuals were exposed to several historical traumas: "the fall of France, the ignominies of occupation and collaboration, the existential uncertainties of the Cold War and the nuclear age, humiliating defeat in Indochina, and a colonial uprising in Algeria that precipitated the end of the Fourth Republic and brought the nation to the brink of civil war. The social and cultural changes France experienced during these years were equally profound. France was transformed from predominantly rural to primarily urban. Traditional cultural values seemed threatened by a

¹ [Postmodernism \(Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy\)](#)

rising tide of mass culture. Formerly one of the Europe's leading powers, France was forced to accustom itself to a new role as a bit player on the stage of world politics."² These catastrophes shattered the conceptual framework within which French intellectuals worked giving rise to a philosophical nihilism and, eventually, a radical mistrust of every concept linked to the Western liberal civilization and the Enlightenment, especially the very concepts of language, culture and reason.

Thus, postmodernism was initially a reaction both to Western Liberal Capitalism and to the totalitarian horrors of the Nazis, Fascists and Soviets. As postmodernism strengthened in the mid '70s, it was also construed as the reflection of the disappointed revolutionary generation of '68 and the incorporation of many of its members into the professional and managerial 'new middle class', and a symptom of political frustration and social mobility.³ For present day postmodernist scholars, however, it has developed into a significant intellectual or cultural phenomenon in its own right.

The term 'postmodernism' entered the philosophical lexicon in 1979 with the publication of 'The Postmodern Condition' by Jean-François Lyotard, in which he characterised postmodernism as possessing an 'incredulity toward metanarratives'. A metanarrative refers to a theory that tries to give a totalizing, comprehensive account to various historical events, experiences, and social, cultural phenomena based upon the appeal to universal truth or universal values.⁴ Simply put, postmodernism adopts an attitude of scepticism, irony towards and rejection of any ideology or grand narrative (religion, Marxism, Freudianism etc.) that attempts to define what is wrong with the world and provide a method through which the necessary rectifications could be made. Similarly, all forms of universalism including the notions of reason, human nature, social progress, objective truth and objective reality are inherently suspected.

Postmodernism argues that the Enlightenment project had failed in improving the lives of humans, and that the two world wars, the threat of nuclear destruction and environmental problems were testament to this failure. While the Enlightenment philosophers had maintained that every problem can be explained and solved using reason, this had led to the expression of ideological traditions that offered rival conceptions of the good life, for example, liberalism and Marxism, and their failure had undermined public faith in all such metanarratives arising from reason. In contrast, in the postmodern, post-industrial, consumer driven, media dominated, globalised society people no longer want to identify with metanarratives, instead they prefer fragmentation and diversity, in that all views are valuable and equal.

Postmodernists claim that the theory developed in the big, advanced cities due to an increased understanding and awareness of the different ways of thinking over time. Postmodernity is, thus, linked to post-industrialism, in that the development of society is no longer dependent upon the manufacturing industry, but more reliant upon knowledge and communication. In such 'information' societies, individualism replaces class, religious and ethnic loyalties.

Lyotard contends that metanarratives have "lost their credibility" due to the technological progress in the areas of communication, mass media and computer science. He then posits the replacement of the totalitarianism of metanarratives with a plurality of small, localized narratives. Thus, by focusing on specific local contexts as well as the diversity of human experience postmodernism argues for the recognition of a "multiplicity of theoretical standpoints" or in other words epistemological relativism. The postmodern society then winds

² Richard Wolin, *The Seduction of Unreason – The Intellectual Romance with Fascism from Nietzsche to Postmodernism*, Princeton University Press (2004)

³ Alex Callinicos, *Against Postmodernism: A Marxist Critique*

⁴ [Metanarrative - New World Encyclopedia](#)

up being characterized by a breakdown into multiple incomparable and contrasting micronarratives and localized realities leading to the political expression of identity politics.

Jacques Derrida (1939-2004), one of the leading postmodern theorists, also held the concept that no objective or absolute truths existed and that elites construct dominant narratives about reality. His famous sentence “nothing outside the text” reflects that all forms of truth are contextual. The purpose of such dominant narratives is simply to serve the power interest of the Elite, and to oppress and marginalise minorities (or ‘others’). According to Derrida, language fails in its representation of reality. The semiotic determinants of language mandate that all linguistic representations fail a priori in their efforts to provide an objective view of reality. As language operates at a spatial and temporal remove from reality, meaning is never ‘present’, but is deferred to other signs, and so all truth related claims made by language are secondary and derivative. Derrida termed this ‘Différance’ which dually means ‘to differ’ and ‘to defer’. In arguing this, Derrida relies on the following two claims of Ferdinand de Saussure (1) that language systems are constituted by a series of internal differences as opposed to a direct correspondence with reality; and (2) that the phenomes or signifiers employed in speech are arbitrary i.e. in a relationship of utter contingency vis-à-vis questions of meaning. Thus, if ‘difference’ is prior to ‘presence’, and language signifiers are arbitrary, then a systematic account of truth is a linguistic impossibility. Also, Derrida contends that in a classical philosophical opposition we are not dealing with the peaceful coexistence of a vis-à-vis, but with a violent hierarchy: one of the two terms governs the other or has the upper hand, for example, signified over signifier, intelligible over sensible, speech over writing. Derrida then proposes that texts must be ‘deconstructed’, i.e. reduced to their constituent parts and then reinterpreted, so that these oppositions within texts are exposed and overturned. To be effective deconstruction also needs to create new terms – Derrida called these undecidables – that can no longer be included within binary opposition.

A similar indictment of reason was presented by Michel Foucault. For Foucault, truth is neither neutral nor disinterested, but rather inextricably linked to power. In ‘Truth and Power’, Foucault claims that “truth is a thing of this world” and that as such it must be understood “as a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation, and operation of statements.” Thus, truth is “linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extends it.” For Foucault, truth is a dangerous concept because by assuming a position of objectivity it systematically conceals its own prejudices, partisanship and biases. Thus, power is disguised in the form of truth, and hence, the Foucauldian neologism “power-knowledge”. The historical analysis of the will to knowledge, for Foucault, “reveals that all knowledge rests upon injustice; that there is no right, not even in the act of knowing, to truth or a foundation for truth; and that the instinct for knowledge is *malicious* (something murderous, opposed to the happiness of mankind).” It is evident that Foucault is not just condemning certain manifestations of knowledge, but is characterizing all forms of knowledge as ‘something murderous’ and resting upon injustice. For Foucault, all claims of ‘right’ or ‘justice’ are subsumed under claims of power. Power is omnipotent, ever present, the metaphysical fundamental basis of everything. After all, ‘power is everywhere’, diffused and embodied in discourse, knowledge and ‘regimes of truth’.

Postmodernism then is an anti-grand narrative theory based on four key tenets: relativism, that truths (scientific, historic, psychological, natural, behavioural etc.) are social constructions depending especially on the power status manifested especially across race, class, gender and sexual orientation; scepticism, that objective knowledge of any kind is impossible (and language does not refer to a reality outside itself); indictment of logocentrism, that reason is a tool used by empowered groups to maintain their hegemony over the oppressed; and liberation, which is achieved by deconstructing the metanarratives and categories used by the empowered, and by valuing authenticity, in the form of the

emotions and experiences of the oppressed groups, over rational argument. According to Umberto Eco, postmodernism is “the sense that the past is restricting, smothering, blackmailing us”.

Among the Western academia postmodernism stirred up huge controversies not least because it cast doubt over the entire traditional Western hermeneutic model or interpretive approach to experience. The classical liberals accused postmodernism of unfettered relativism, in that it rejects the idea that even science is able to reliably distinguish truth from falsehood. According to an American rationalist philosopher, postmodernists: “...are responsible for the intellectual fad that made it respectable to be cynical about truth and facts”.⁵ The traditional Marxists accused postmodernism of a form of conservatism, in that a non-foundationalist political stance neither offers any perspective from which the existing order may be criticised, nor proposes any basis for the construction of an alternative social order. For the Marxists, the postmodernist undermining of the traditional class struggle, by the further division of the proletariat into intersectional groups, was an attempt at maintaining the liberal status quo.

Postmodernism has also been attacked in the Western academia due to the use of obscure language. According to critics, the postmodernist prioritization of word play over logic has resulted in a theory that is more literary than philosophical and that rarely, if ever, comes to empirically testable or rational conclusions merely because it is so difficult to be sure about what has actually been said. This has then left the text open to many diverse sorts of interpretation leading to irrationalism and logical inconsistency within their arguments. Naturally it has also resulted in tremendous difficulty to critique any of the works. According to the American philosopher John Searle: “Michel Foucault once characterized Derrida’s prose style to me as ‘*obscurantisme terroriste*’. The text is written so obscurely that you can’t figure out exactly what the thesis is (hence ‘*obscurantisme*’) and then when one criticizes this, the author says, ‘Vous m’avez mal compris; vous êtes idiot’ (hence ‘*terroriste*’).⁶

The same problem has been highlighted in all the disciplines influenced by postmodernism. The following sentence from Judith Butler, a third wave feminist who personally rejects the term ‘postmodernism’ as too vague to be meaningful, illustrates this point perfectly: “The move from a structuralist account in which capital is understood to structure social relations in relatively homologous ways to a view of hegemony in which power relations are subject to repetition, convergence, and rearticulation brought the question of temporality into the thinking of structure, and marked a shift from a form of Althusserian theory that takes structural tonalities as theoretical objects to one in which the insights into the contingent possibility of structure inaugurate a renewed conception of hegemony as bound up with the contingent sites and strategies of the rearticulation of power.”⁷

The distinction between sensical and nonsensical has not only caused difficulty for outsiders, but also for the postmodernist in-group as made clear by the ‘Sokal hoax’ performed by Alan Sokal, a physics professor, in 1996. He submitted an article titled “Transgressing the Boundaries: Towards a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity” to *Social Text*, a leading academic journal of postmodern culture studies. Without the slightest evidence or argument Sokal declared in the article that ‘physical reality’, not our *theories* of physical reality, but the reality itself, was as a social and linguistic construct. He further claimed that quantum gravity had progressive political implications, and that the ‘morphogenetic field’ could be a valid theory of quantum gravity. The article was published,

⁵ [Daniel Dennett: ‘I begrudge every hour I have to spend worrying about politics’ | Daniel Dennett | The Guardian](#)

⁶ New York Review of Books, 27 October 1983

⁷ Judith Butler, ‘Further reflections on conversations of our time’, *Diacritics*, vol. 27, no. 1, Spring 1997

and three weeks later Sokal revealed that it was a hoax. Afterwards Sokal said 'anyone who believes that the laws of physics are mere social conventions is invited to try transgressing those conventions from the windows of my apartment. I live on the twenty-first floor.'⁸ In recent years, Sokal style hoaxes have been repeated successfully with nonsensical articles being published even in peer review academic journals, making it clear that these areas of academic study have become playgrounds for frauds and that there is nothing that cannot be claimed as long as it appeals to the ideological preconceptions of the editors and uses the same kind of vague, incomprehensible language as the leading 'intellectuals'.

It is clear from this brief summary that postmodernism is an irrational, illogical and empirically untenable doctrine. More importantly, it is fundamentally at odds with the Islamic Aqeedah. The theory emerged as a critique of the Enlightenment values, but failed both in understanding the fallacies of the Enlightenment philosophers, and in reaching any sorts of valid conclusions.

To begin with, Lyotard's 'incredulity toward metanarratives' could be seen as a metanarrative in itself. By postulating that postmodernity contains a universal scepticism toward metanarratives, 'universal scepticism' is in itself transformed into a contemporary metanarrative. The whole postmodern doctrine assumes and posits many 'beliefs', for example, regarding science, patriarchy, power relations, sexuality etc., and these constitute a metanarrative, thus self-contradicting the postmodern critique of the metanarrative (Postmodernism is "the theory of rejecting theories"). Similarly, if one is sceptical of such universals as 'truth', 'knowledge', 'right', or 'wrong', there remains no basis for accepting Lyotard's 'truth' that metanarratives have become untenable by technological progress. This reveals the logical inconsistency of postmodernism.

Another logical inconsistency is that while postmodernism claims universal scepticism toward all metanarratives, postmodern theorists were guided to a greater or lesser degree by the re-reading or redemption of Marx. Most of the French intellectuals (Derrida, Foucault, Lyotard, Barthes etc.) responsible for the theoretical inspiration of postmodernism worked within a broadly Marxist paradigm. These French intellectuals having been ardent supporters of Marx, Stalin and Mao, were apparently forced to undertake this transformation from Marxism to postmodernism after the horrors of the collectivisation schemes were revealed, and it became evident that the Marxist doctrine itself was a problem, not its implementation by an inefficient bureaucracy. Thus, this manoeuvring served as a basis for these theorists to maintain their prestige in intellectual circles without having to confront the horrifying outcomes of their theories. Marxist conceptions, though disguised amid incomprehensible language, are present throughout postmodernist works, and simply pointing out statements by postmodernist scholars claiming to be anti-Marxist is merely a fallacious circular argument.

This Marxist paradigm is central to the irrationality of Lyotard's 'truth' that metanarratives have become untenable by technological progress, in that, it fails to understand the defining components of a society, thereby, conflating two entirely different aspects of a society, namely, the materialistic outward aspect and the ideological aspect. The components of a society are the bases upon which permanent relationships between individuals are built and the factors that regulate these relationships. As such, the formation of a society rests upon the knowledge of what it contains in terms of thoughts and concepts, and what emanates from these in terms of sentiments and values. Following this is the knowledge of that which regulates the relationships in terms of systems and laws. It is evident that the material progress of a society has no relation to the formation of the society. Thus, the material progress of a society, based on scientific and technological progress, should be

⁸ The paper was unpublished but has been attached as an appendix to Alan Sokal and Jean Bricmont's book *Fashionable Nonsense*.

distinguished from the systems implemented over it, based on the thoughts and concepts that are held within the society. The reality of all historical and contemporary societies is that outward aspects, material progress based on scientific and technological progress, do not determine the systems that are applied on the people. And so, the basic differences between two societies are not dependent on differences in the degree of material progress, rather on the concepts and ideas that are held by the people. Summarily, the manifest means and styles employed by any metanarrative may transmute over time, but the thoughts, concepts, and consequently, the systems and laws continue in an independent fashion.

Further, if postmodernity is seen as a new age, the postulate that technological progress has led to increased scepticism towards metanarratives is falsified by the global rise of a call towards a single, united, ideological Islamic State, not only within Muslim countries, but also among the ever increasing number of Muslim converts in the highly developed North American and Western European countries. Similarly, the rise of the far-right conservative Christian movements, the election of Trump, Orbán and Johnson, and the vote on Brexit undermine Lyotard's incredulity postulate.

As for the postmodern argument that universal truths do not exist, knowledge of such truths is biased, and that such truths are merely subjective, created and contextual, it is inconsistent logically, scientifically and rationally. By positing that people have stopped believing in metanarratives because such narratives marginalise minorities, Lyotard implicitly accepts the notion of a universal belief in justice. Universal truths exist irrespective of the language used to describe them. An objective universal truth is that only biological women are capable of giving birth. A similar truth is that the Sun rises from the East. Furthermore, the categorization of reality by language into two distinct binary forms – biological women vs biological men, or East vs West – does not in any manner reduce the authenticity of these two claims. For example, even if we were to assume, ignoring all available scientific data, that there are an infinite number of genders between the two extreme biological realities, i.e. a fluid gender spectrum, it does not negate the existence of the two extremes. To understand this, consider the example of day vs night: while it is true that the day gradually merges into night, and it is also true that the exact time at which the day transitions into night is indeterminate, it does not negate the fact that the 'day' is distinct and opposite to the 'night'. To 'deconstruct' the difference between day and night using subjective claims, or to dismiss this difference as a mere social construct is nothing but a logical fallacy and irrational.

In addition, the claim that the binary form of thinking by virtue of categorizing leads to the creation of value hierarchies, is itself problematic. The recognition of one extreme, say 'day', does not imply the inferiority of the other extreme, in this case 'night'. Similarly, the recognition of 'peace' does not necessarily imply the immorality of 'war'. Rather values emanate from the thoughts that are held by the people, and while peace may be desirable at some times, other times may necessitate war. An Islamic State may be inclined to establish peaceful trade relations in one period, while it may declare war in another period, considering both to be equally virtuous.

The core problem, due to which postmodernism rejects all sorts of objective knowledge, is its failure to distinguish reality from judgements on reality. The reality of any situation is not subject to disagreement among people, particularly if the reality is related to senses because different people who are able to sense the situation or object will be capable of knowing the objective reality of the situation or object. However, the judgements on reality will differ among people according to their viewpoint. While looking at situations or objects from a specific viewpoint is related to passing judgements on them, seeing facts, as they are, is related to the senses and comprehension. Hence, it is possible for individuals to arrive at objective knowledge of reality despite maintaining an individual, cultural or ideological viewpoint on that reality.

Derrida's claim that categorising judgements or interpretations of reality privileges one concept and pushes out others to the margins is problematic. The postmodern argument is that due to the existence of an infinite number of interpretations of the world, the oppressors categorise such that they only choose those narratives that serve as tools of oppression while marginalising all other narratives. One problem with this is that while there may exist an infinite number of interpretations this does not necessarily imply that an equally infinite number of valid interpretations may be made. This means that among other factors, interpretations are constrained by whether they ensure the desired outcome in a specified time period and by the necessity of iteration over lengthier periods of time in a context defined by an individual, their family, community and broader society. The second problem, and this is the major error in Foucault's work, is that because the key postmodern narrative is of the oppressor versus the oppressed, it tends to reduce every human act to the pursuit of power. This, however, stems from an incomplete understanding of the value systems that motivate human behaviour. While it is true that people may pursue power, it is equally true that people also undertake actions in the pursuit of moral, spiritual or humanitarian values. Thus, it is wrong to assume that categorising, and hence, marginalising serves only as a means of consolidating power.

Additionally, this raises the question as to what postmodernism itself marginalises when it categorises everything into a power game played across race, class, gender and sexual orientation. Among others competence, genuine diversity (based on individual skill sets, as opposed to the imposition of group characteristics onto individuals), reasonable discourse, cooperation and moral, spiritual, humanitarian values are all marginalised and rendered meaningless by the postmodern categorisation.

Similarly, the argument that power is purely subjective based on language and concepts, and that the empowered create truths using language as a tool, does not entirely stand in the face of rational investigation. This argument would imply that the European colonialism of India, or the trans-Atlantic slave trade were merely undertaken through the use of language. A mere superficial understanding of those eras reveals that this would be an incomplete understanding of the nature of colonial power relations which were instead primarily based on differences in the degree of military strength, ideological, political strength and economic power. It would be ignorant to assume that the British could have been removed from their colonial position in India simply by deconstructing their dominant narratives and substituting their 'Oriental – Occident' binary with new non-binary terminology. This weakness of deconstruction outside the realm of literary and philosophical works led to it being surpassed by the more politically engaged paradigms of 'cultural studies' and Foucault-inspired 'new historicism' (which, due to the reduction of all discursive practices to power relations, is also incorrect). Later on, Derrida tried to redress this weakness by writing widely on issues of justice, ethics, and politics. Even if we assume these are not mere free-plays of words, it is still evident that these theoretical abstractions regarding 'the political' remain detached from 'real' politics.

Further, Derrida's proposition that all truth related claims made using language are secondary and derivate runs into a logical inconsistency. By attempting to define an alternative theory explaining the relationship between representation and reality, Derrida, at least implicitly, argues that his account is more verisimilar vis-a-vis the way things really are, and that the leading competing accounts are less representative of reality. Thus, Derrida, whose philosophy attempts to unmask, deconstruct and eliminate the last remnants of Western metaphysics, may also be viewed as its consummate practitioner.

A more brutal reflection of the postmodern relativism is that when unbounded scepticism is considered the norm, it may end up trivializing the unbearable suffering that natural forces or oppressive, totalitarian regimes have unleashed over humanity. The havoc wreaked by tornadoes, hurricanes and earthquakes is undoubtedly irrefutable, as are the horrors of the

Nazi concentration camps, the Soviet gulags, and the Guantanamo Bay prison. In this regard, pain is perhaps one of the most fundamental objective realities.

While postmodernism insists on the absence of facts, it remains a theoretical abstraction as it is impossible for any individual to adopt a radical stance of relativism regarding all aspects of life. In any case, their physical bodies tend to accept the constraints of several undeniable facts. It is evident that denial of biological truths does not in any case amount to an undermining of even the most basic biological truth i.e. “Every soul has to taste death”⁹. Similarly, proposing that the theoretical explanations of empirical observations of natural laws are merely subjective does not render the sceptic with the ability to transgress even the basic laws, for example, the gravitational pull of the Earth.

Further, the postmodernist argument that reason and logic is a tool of oppression is hypocritical, because postmodernists tend to support their theories with arguments. If every discourse is a tool of oppression in the never ending power game, postmodernism itself becomes a tool of oppression.

Even more threatening is the fact that if reason is simply construed as a tool of oppression, then two people or groups who disagree have no common grounds to resolve their differences – after all there is no objective truth for them even to be right or wrong about. This was highlighted by Lyotard in his equating of “consensus” with “terror”. For Lyotard, the very idea of uncoerced, rational accord is a fantasy. In the words of Nietzsche, “where there is no truth, there is only power”. This provides an alarming insight into the excessive postmodern obsession with power relations. By reducing every human motivation to a pursuit of power, it appears that postmodernism tends to justify its own use of power. A truly postmodern society would breakdown into multiple competing, narratives, with no means of agreeing on reality, thus, it appears that the only way toward any semblance of order would be through a brute display of power. It is also apparent that postmodernism has been deeply inspired by the theories of Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, Maurice Blanchot, and Paul de Man - all of whom either prefigured or succumbed to the proverbial intellectual ‘fascination with fascism’.

The political manifestation of postmodernism as identity or identitarian politics is deeply erroneous, misleading and self-contradictory. As discussed previously, it arises from the need of dismantling metanarratives and replacing them with localized subjective narratives, thus, forming political positions based on the interests and perspectives of social groups with which people identify: race, gender, identity, ethnicity, nationality, sexual orientation, disability, religion, culture, language and dialect. This developed in the latter part of the 20th century during the Civil Rights Movement and has particularly strengthened since the 1980s.

The defining feature of identity politics is its preference for subjectivist, standpoint epistemology over any sort of rational or scientific epistemology because reason and science are merely assumed to be tools used for the endless perpetuation of tyranny. This is also indicative of the Marxist framework within which postmodernism operates. If it is understood that reality is merely reflected onto the brain, it naturally follows that only a subjectivist approach should be adopted to deal with all problems that arise. However, instead of dividing society between the bourgeoisie and proletariat, as Marx did, postmodernism has divided society into many different segments on the basis of lived experiences.

Such a fragmentation of society is deeply problematic in that it tends to fracture broad based solidarity on any issue. For instance, the vital issue to be dealt with in Muslim countries is the overthrow of the current regimes and the reestablishment of the Islamic Khilafah (Caliphate). However, if society were to be fragmented into numerous groups, each

⁹ Quran 3:185

practically pitted against the other, a broad based support for the Khilafah would be very difficult to amass and the result would be total political inaction.

Further, a subjectivist epistemological approach claims that only those associated with a particular identity – the in-group - are authorized, by virtue of their lived experiences, to talk about their matters, and that others – the out-group – cannot ever understand these issues. This approach is problematic and inherently contradictory. If the out-group, say men, take up and talk about the issues of women, they are accused of colonizing the space of women. On the other hand, if men ignore the issues of women they are accused of marginalizing women. This form of identity politics is deeply narcissistic and also serves to further isolate various identities.

The deepest inherent contradiction within the identity politics framework is the issue of essentialism vs nonessentialism. Postmodernism holds that identities are produced as a result of discourse between the oppressors and the oppressed, such as white vs black, heterosexual vs homosexual, male vs female, and so these identities are stereotypical essentialized social constructs. However, in forming identity based political or social groups – for the purpose of contrasting binaries in order to remove tyranny – postmodernism itself falls prey to essentialism. Thus, identity politics is itself what it seeks to overthrow. The intersectionality movement has discovered this flaw within identity politics and posits multiple intersecting identities for each individual. However, a completely non-essentialist approach is incompatible with any meaningful form of political activity. All that the intersectionality movement has achieved is a sort of victimhood competition among various ‘marginalised’ groups.

Another problem with the oppressor vs oppressed framework is that people who do not subscribe to or act according to the postmodern metanarrative, are automatically labelled ‘oppressors’. Unsurprisingly, reproducing and contrasting these binaries within this framework, and constantly bashing the ‘oppressors’ has resulted in their adopting identity politics as well, for example, the emergence of white identity politics at the far-right end of the political spectrum and the embrace of the ‘right to difference’ by the European New Right as a justification for racial separatism.

Thus, it is clear that the postmodern rejection of truths, objective knowledge, and reason remains a theoretical abstraction and is not conducive for political action. After all, if even, according to Foucault, emancipation is a trap laid by the forces of ‘governmentality’ to inscribe the ‘subject’ in the clutches of ‘power-knowledge’, there is no point in trying to contest power that is present everywhere.

The rejection of reason by postmodernism stems from their understanding that the Enlightenment was responsible for the introduction of reason within human discourses. However, the fundamental error is not the introduction of reason, but its misappropriation in matters that are well outside the purview of reason. This failure in recognising the fundamental error resulted because they were misguided by the popular modernist narrative, according to which, Enlightenment heralded a new Age of Reason, liberating people from the myths and superstitions of the past. With this definition of the Enlightenment in mind, it was only natural for postmodernist scholars to criticize the use of reason to the extent that they deemed reason to be the source for all the catastrophes of the modern age. However, this is a deeply narcissistic Euro-centrist narrative for it claims that prior to the Enlightenment, all cultures were merely based on irrational beliefs, myths and superstitions. This is an incorrect judgement for humans have always been rational beings.

The actual error i.e. the misappropriation of reason in matters that are well outside its purview, manifested in the Enlightenment philosophers decreeing that sovereignty belongs to the people and that they are not permitted to submit to the sovereignty of another. This is the cornerstone of the Western modern civilization and the real source for all its problems

because people are not qualified to be their own sovereign. Rather sovereignty must reside with the One who created people because He Alone knows the purpose of their existence, and alone has perfect knowledge of human nature (fitrah). Because humans are limited, they have an imperfect understanding of the purpose of their existence, as well as an imperfect understanding of their own innate nature (fitrah). It follows that the people must discover, in a rational manner, who created them, and then acknowledge the sovereignty of their Creator by following his commands in the individual and collective sphere. Therefore, reason and intellect must be exercised in determining the existence of a Creator, and then in comprehending the commands that He has provided us with through His Messengers. The postmodernist scholars, thus, failed in even understanding the Enlightenment values, let alone in proposing valid solutions to the problems emanating from those values.

When postmodernism is studied in depth, its need for a deceiving, rhetorical language also becomes evident. It is clear that anyone possessing the truth will attempt to explain it in as clear a manner as possible. It is intellectual dishonesty to obscure ideas with incomprehensible language. However, postmodern theorists have deliberately used inaccessible language within their texts that is barely understandable by anyone who is not thoroughly immersed into its literature. This serves two major purposes: First, this 'private lingo' appears to bestow great prestige on these intellectuals. Second, it serves to protect postmodern texts from external scrutiny. Thus, by using such language postmodernists attempt to conceal the fact that most of their theories are either irrational, illogical, antiscientific, or if accurate, nothing more than a monosyllabic truism.

From an objective Islamic standpoint, it is apparent that postmodernism is a flawed and erroneous concept. Islam is a complete ideology (or metanarrative), and the validity of Islam for all times and places is an issue that is part of the Aqeedah of a Muslim. Since Islam is the final Deen prescribed by Allah (swt) for all humankind, therefore not believing in its validity for any period in time after the Prophet Muhammad (saw) implies the denial of Allah (swt) as the Legislator. This denial for any reason takes one out of the folds of Islam because not only is it a defiance of the essence of Islam, which is to worship Allah (swt) in entirety but also a limitation on Allah (swt) as the only Legislator for all times and places.

Islam has recognized that universal truths exist, and that we are able to obtain objective knowledge regarding those truths. Islam also accepts rational discourse as a means of propagating the message of the truth. This is reflected in the fact that Islam made the rational acceptance of its Aqeedah a condition for embracing it. The Messengers of Allah (swt) recognised the existence of a single Creator on the basis of rational evidences, and used the same rational evidences to call others towards the truth. This is witnessed in the story of Ibrahim (as) when he saw a star and took it for his Lord, but when the star disappeared he realised that the star could not be his Lord. He then saw the moon, and took it for his Lord, but when the moon disappeared he realised that the moon could not be his Lord. He then took the sun for his Lord, but when the sun disappeared he realised that the sun could not be his Lord. This made him realise that the star, the moon and the sun were limited and dependent, and that the true Creator could neither be limited nor dependent. He then recognised that Allah (swt) was the Creator of the star, the moon, the sun and everything within the universe, and that He (swt) was Eternal and Independent. The Quran uses the same rational epistemological approach towards determining the existence of the Creator:

﴿إِنَّ فِي خَلْقِ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَاخْتِلَافِ اللَّيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ لَآيَاتٍ لِّأُولِي الْأَلْبَابِ﴾ **“Behold! In the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alteration of night and day, these are indeed signs for men of understanding.”**¹⁰ Ibrahim (as) also used the objective knowledge of universal truths in calling others towards a common rational grounds from where to proceed: ﴿وَإِذْ قُلْنَا: **“Have** ادْخُلُوا هَذِهِ الْقَرْيَةَ فَكُلُوا مِنْهَا حَيْثُ شِئْتُمْ رَغَدًا وَاَدْخُلُوا الْبَابَ سُجَّدًا وَقُولُوا حِطَّةً نَّغْفِرْ لَكُمْ خَطَايَاكُمْ وَسَنَزِيدُ الْمُحْسِنِينَ﴾

¹⁰ Quran 3:190

you not considered the one who argued with Abraham about his Lord [merely] because Allah had given him kingship? When Abraham said, "My Lord is the one who gives life and causes death," he said, "I give life and cause death." Abraham said, "Indeed, Allah brings up the sun from the east, so bring it up from the west." So the disbeliever was overwhelmed [by astonishment], and Allah does not guide the wrongdoing people."¹¹ This is also emblematic of the superior method of Islam, in that, it directly employs a clear and simple understanding of reality in response to those who attempt to misconstrue it via weak and deceiving language games.

Islam also rejects identity politics as distinctions made on the basis of race, ethnicity, language etc. are invalid, and all Muslims are considered one united body with one ideology. Political parties within the Khilafah would not hold separate 'identities' rather all such parties would be based solely on the Islamic Aqeedah. This is because the evidence for establishing political parties also clearly explains the goals of such parties. "And let there be [arising] from you a nation (a band of people) inviting to [all that is] good, enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong, and those will be the successful."¹² Thus, political parties must enjoin the Ma'ruf (good) and prohibit the Munkar (evil). The establishment of parties that carry out something prohibited such as the spread of un-Islamic ideas is prohibited and will be prevented by the State.

The subjectivist postmodern approach towards issues of different cultures is also rejected by Islam, for Islam is a universal message. **﴿قُلْ يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنِّي رَسُولُ اللَّهِ إِلَيْكُمْ جَمِيعًا الَّذِي لَهُ مُلْكُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ﴾** "Say (O Muhammad): 'O mankind! Verily, I am sent to you all as the Messenger of Allah - to Whom belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth.'"¹³ And, **﴿وَكَانَ النَّبِيُّ يُبْعَثُ إِلَى قَوْمِهِ خَاصَّةً، وَبُعِثْتُ إِلَى النَّاسِ عَامَّةً﴾** "Every Prophet was sent to his nation only but I have been sent to all mankind."¹⁴ This form of epistemology holds that each of the different political identity groups are correct according to their own subjective interpretation of reality. This is a great error for Islam marks a clear distinction between the truth and falsehood, and Muslims must accept this distinction. Whereas Islam allows Dhimmis to follow their own religions, this does not mean that Islam allows Muslims to consider other world views as correct even for others.

Postmodernism is yet another incorrect theory that has emerged from the Western philosophers after they divorced religion (deen) from the world (duniya). It is clear that postmodernism is invalid in its basic and core ideas. It must be rejected in its entirety, along with the entire edifice of thinking that has been constructed upon its basic ideas. The Enlightenment values also need to be rejected and dismantled. In conclusion, what is required is the establishment of a State where civilization is based solely on the basis of the commands of the Creator and not on incoherent theories espoused by irrational people.

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¹¹ Quran 2:258

¹² Quran 3:104

¹³ Quran 7:158

¹⁴ Recorded by Al-Bukhari, Kitabut-Tayammum, hadith no. 335 from the narration of Jabir bin 'Abdullah Al-Ansary, and by Muslim, Kitabut-Masajid hadith no. 521. According to the latter's version, the Prophet (peace be upon him) said, "Every Prophet used to be sent to his nation only but I have been sent to every (one with) a red or black (complexion) (i.e., to all races)."