

REALITY vs POSTMODERNISM

THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH (#3)

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I am by nature a truth-seeker. I want my beliefs to **correspond** as accurately as possible with how the world in fact operates.

Most of what we first believe about the world is taught and told to us by parents, teachers, books and other media. We can't check every piece of information. We only go to such lengths if a question is very important to us and there is reason to doubt what one believes. There may be a **contradiction** in the information coming from different sources.

We can also be misled just by the way things are **labelled**. A quick example: the *Department of Justice* in a country is in fact the *Department of Laws* as drafted by the constitution-writers, the lawmakers, and the judges of that country. It is of course still a valid question whether the laws of that country are in fact just.

Sometimes there's a problem because of **ambiguous** wording. Consider a lightweight example: someone says that *ladies don't use vulgar words*. You could raise the issue at a drinking party and be ear-bashed by loud and persistent debaters. One side insists that *of course ladies don't*; the other side insists that *some ladies certainly do!*¹

The curious thing about this kind of argument is that the opponents have exactly the same knowledge of the world, but may nevertheless continue this dispute

for a long time! My advice would be to stay out of this argument unless the participants are sober enough to understand the following explanation:

This is a **verbal dispute**, persisting only because a word – in this case, "*lady*" – is being used with two different meanings. Once you **define** the word *lady*, the plain truth is blindingly obvious to all parties.

Very simply:

If the word *lady* means female human, then yes, some do use vulgar words. If the word *lady* means highly "refined" females with strict good manners, then they don't!

It is truly amazing how many popular disputes evaporate when you accept that words often have more than one **definition** – and you settle on one definition throughout your argument.

So basic housekeeping for the truth-seeker includes **fact checking, consistency, label checking** and **definition checking**. These improve one's ability to discern what is actually "out there". Wisdom grows slowly but steadily. Avoid both wishful thinking and pessimism. Why go to this trouble? Well, the more acquainted one is with reality, the fewer ways it will bite one.

By now, you're probably thinking my words sound awfully old-fashioned. Truth? Logic? These concepts have come under attack in recent decades. There's a modern intellectual movement called

¹ I remember this clear example of a verbal dispute from 54 years ago. I read it in an **Introduction to Philosophy** by a British philosopher of the **linguistic analysis** school.

postmodernism which rejects the notion of objective facts and values.

In the century past, western civilisation has undergone a catastrophic disillusionment of traditional beliefs and values. Racial superiority doctrines led to Nazism. Utopian egalitarian politics led to Communism. Together these “ideals” wrought the greatest rate of slaughter and suffering in all history.

Since the counter-culture of the late 60s, postmodernism has spread through academia, undermining the notion of objective reality (*it's true for you but not for me*) and undermining uninhibited open debate (*you can say anything except what is politically incorrect*).

Postmodernism has gone too far. Certainly, a lot of traditional ideas of what is true and right got trashed in the 20th century. Modern technologies, such as air travel and television, exposed cultures to other cultures. Traditional local beliefs fell like flies. Cultural relativism has led to a fad of universal nihilism – the belief that there is no objective truth and no objective values.

Modern birth control undermined very strict traditional social rules concerning sexual activity and gender roles. Long-held rigid belief in local social mores were discarded, historically speaking, overnight. Postmodernism replaced traditional values and beliefs with a philosophical free-for-all.

Whoever jumped in first could call their propositions *politically correct*.

Postmodernism today has been harnessed to justify a very particular political path, one which seeks to divide people into deserving and undeserving physical types – females & males, coloureds & whites, LGBTQI & heteros. People are being judged according to identity rather than character. This new

wave of discrimination is a backward step, which can only cause more suffering. It divides people into tribes again and is being used to justify ever-increasing social indoctrination, discrimination and greater regulation of personal behaviour.

My rebuttal to postmodernism is that ***real facts and values will always be with us***. We got safely to the moon and back using Newtonian physics – objectively reliable truths about the way the world works at these speeds. Modern medicine has eliminated death from certain diseases and made birth vastly safer. “Cultural” legends and myths could never achieve these goals.

What about values then? Some old values have been discarded: such as life-long loyalty to a monarch with absolute power; or championing a particular race as if it were inherently more worthy than every other. We humans have to continually sort the wheat from the chaff, because our never-ending ***evolution*** – of ideas, inventions, and social environment – inevitably show up inadequacies in our old assumptions.

But the collapse of ***some*** – once powerful – cultural values does not eliminate ***enduring*** values which stand the test of time. Take an example. It is still true – as it always was – that honourable behaviour enhances the quality of human life. Quoting from Heraclitus, from the dawn of western civilisation, ***character is destiny***.

The search for truth goes on. Human behaviour has consequences: and they are not random. Reality embodies principles which we need to learn. The more successful society will be the one that is better acquainted with the truth.

Whatever you go for, reality is what you get. POC