



10. Summary and Conclusions

There are two levels to what has been here referred to as “postmodernism.” On the one hand, there is its “commercial” facet, so to speak, and its “artistic,” valuable prototype, on the other. And the two are somewhat different things. The postmodernism conventionally spoken of is the commercial production, which has made inroads into America’s public discourse since the reception of Foucauldians such as Lyotard and the new wave of French anti-humanists. It is this pragmatic decalogue of relativism and antagonism wielded for their own sake that has been incorporated for the past forty years into the ethos of the American bureaucracy.

Dressed up as the imperative of “respecting each other’s differences,” such an incorporation has been reckoned by the self-congratulatory speech of the authorities a most important

milestone on the path to higher civility. That the country's white elites are no less intolerant than they were before, and that they have profited from congealing, as it were, the unresolved problems stemming from their incapacity to treat "the others" as nothing but second or third-class citizens, is understood. That is especially the case with America's Hispanic community, whose "diversity" (witness the spate of dual-language provisions set up in its "favor") is flattered so long as it remains an enclave supplying slave-work.

A country that is not so deeply consumed with racial neuroses does not need to remind itself every day to show respect for "difference." What the politics of diversity has effected on the plane of common interaction among "different" individuals is now evident. And that is a general impossibility of weaving genuine communication lest the sensibility of "victimized" people (and everyone may ultimately exhume some distinctive trait to pass as such) be violently aroused by statements that may be interpreted in any way as detracting from the uniqueness of the interlocutors. And it was not unforeseeable that such a clime of fostered incomprehensibility would lead to the sort of strident dissension and organizational palsy that has handicapped the Left since 9/11.

So far, this development may be set down as a refinement of the proverbial "divide and conquer." But there was mythology as well. There has been *creed* involved in all this. Of their "skepticism," "anticlericalism," and religion-bashing the postmodern critics have made a profession. Yet, the fanatical passion with which they have espoused Foucault's

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Power/Knowledge is itself the mark of religious sentiment. The Foucauldian construct is wholly metaphysical. Disbelieving the monotheistic God, while believing in life being spawned at random by the aboriginal Void, is still believing. The intangible notion of “power,” Gnosticism’s *dúnamis*, could not be further removed from the positivist and rationalist confidence that these critics otherwise display in their daily activity.

So, we have been confronted with this odd spectacle of sober and computer-savvy intellectuals, proudly professing their agnosticism and good Liberal upbringing, who swear at the same time by the Gnostic verb of Foucault and Heidegger (or any vulgarized reduction thereof). It is the schizoid allure of this sleepwalking professorate, half-Liberal, half-Gnostic, that gives contemporary higher learning in America such an air of hallucinated unreality.

But there is a deeper theoretical truth to this state of affairs. The truth being that nearly everyone seems agreed that the so-called Liberal age, this celebrated time of democracy and freedom dating from the Industrial Revolution, has not merely failed, but, in fact, has never existed as such. The advent of technique, markets, business, and consumerism did not herald the dawn of an era of freedom but rather the overwhelming mechanization of production and of the exercise of power, which has remained *dynastic*. It was indeed an extraordinary transformation, but certainly not one that brought with it more freedom. At the top, command passed *in part* from blood elites to moneyed elites. The passion for the holocaust, on the other hand, did not disappear; if anything, it was enormously

boosted by powers of devastation that no longer dismembered but rather disintegrated. The suspicion that there lay a lie behind the unbounded optimism of the Enlightenment, and successively of British Liberalism (from John Locke to Alfred Marshall), was confirmed at the outset by the testimony of the Marquis de Sade. Sade was indeed an early Liberal, who had proven that a society, in which nature and reason were enthroned, would not function to guarantee the cultivation of virtue, but would rather affirm the right of the mightiest to impose their will by means of violence.

And so, it has been —especially in the last century, the bloodiest of our recent history. Liberalism, therefore, has long ceased to have any answers and theories, if it ever did, with which to explain the sort of spiritual environment in which the West has been living for the past three hundred years. As for the Marxists, they should have graciously changed their views long ago —at least since the experience of World War I, during which the “workers of the world,” instead of uniting, butchered one another in a world, patriotic conflict. Whither to turn, then?

This left Veblen, on the one hand, and Bataille and Jünger, on the other. Apollinian the one, Dionysians the other two (the German being more stoically detached from the purulence of it all). The works of Bataille and Jünger represent the “artistic,” valuable component of postmodernism because, no matter how foul their aspirations, both authors strove to offer a realistic depiction of our reality —something that may not at all be said for the other exponents of this movement (both on the Left and on the Right), with the possible

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exception of Kojève.

Other than being born nearly fifty years after him, Bataille and Jünger had an advantage over Veblen: they were not Victorians consumed with the illusion that technology could heal the bulk of modernity's infirmities. Therefore, they were able to construe our times as those of nihilistic transformation, in which a tide of alien, technicized patterns of control has pervaded the entirety of the traditional power structure, *centralizing* it, and thereby abolishing any residual forms of ancient, barbarous domination. According to this theory, the Industrial Revolution was but an intermediate phase leading from the epoch of, say, Gilles de Rais to the final stage of the *Glass Bees*, which is our world. Because they were nostalgics, Bataille and Jünger withdrew, and it was then up to individuals such as Kojève to incite the power-hungry to climb the bureaucratic ladder of this centralized and inescapable power structure. In this sense, contemporary postmodernists of the Left and the Right are Kojévians: they acknowledge that this is the world, and that it cannot be overcome —thus, they might as well wield as much power as the network will afford them, each filling the available position that best agrees with his or her temper. Those wishing to play boss will choose Strauss, while the Sunday rebels shall act Foucauldian.

Of course, neither Bataille nor Jünger had ever suggested that power is “decentered.” They argued, realistically, the contrary proposition, determined as they were to offer a penetrating characterization of this obsession of theirs that is power. They might have been both spiritually corrupt, but they were not intellectually dishonest. Intellectually dishonest

like Foucault, instead, who plagiarized Bataille's philosophy of transgression, the *Collège's* lectures on the "core," and the power dynamics of the *Accursed Share* to assemble his Power/Knowledge, which he then sold as a Nietzschean meditation, spiced with a dash of Heidegger. Power/Knowledge was nonetheless an achievement in itself, for it was the first successful specimen of a re-elaboration of neo-Gnostic myth (Bataille's) fit for propagandistic employ. It was successful because it retained the extreme plausibility of Bataille's original characterization of homogeneous and heterogeneous forces, without being burdened on the one hand by its dubious cosmogonic preamble (the headless god), and by a need to identify political responsibility on the other ("no center"). What had disappeared in Power/Knowledge was power itself: clearly, if everyone is powerful, no one is guilty —ergo, the exploitative and war-mongering elite goes scot-free. But this argumentation, however, does not let Bataille off the hook. His tale might have been distorted, but he, like every elitist, believed in antagonism, aristocratic contempt (i.e., "sovereignty") and the necessity of (*stylized*) violence; and the reason he has not been directly endorsed — but only indirectly via Foucault— is, as we have argued, that his production was too pornographic, blunt, or sketchy for a Liberal stomach.

What was needed to diffuse this sort of myth was an orderly *system*, a "theory," which Foucault provided. This was the first system that gave the *rabble* —not the working proletariat— theoretical dignity, and was therefore ideal for institutionalizing, speech-wise, a state of tribal warfare, which

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ultimately spared the elites by portraying them as faceless and decentered, and by contemplating no resolution to the dynamics of opposition (between the gutter and the State).

So, Bataille and Jünger have not made it into the Anglo-American academic mainstream, because their religiosity would have denuded the nature of the game, revealing what is at stake: namely, the kind of creed that underlies it all — a stupefied credence in the Void complemented by a mock-matriarchal celebration of generation and devastation (especially a proclivity for the latter). And, above all, a manifest contempt for cooperativeness; which elitist disdainfulness the benevolent façade of our Liberal democracies will allow in deed but certainly not in discourse. As a result, the system has opted for manipulations of seminal texts, manipulations such as those of Bataille by Foucault and Baudrillard, of Foucault himself by Baudrillard and Hardt and Negri, or of Gnosis and Jünger by Heidegger, and to a very limited degree, of Heidegger and Kojève by Strauss.

In sum, Foucault, Heidegger, Strauss, and their imitators are, properly speaking, impostors, who have tampered with one original or another, creating as they went academic word-games susceptible to ideological use, such as these stories of “minority power” squirting like a geyser, tales of “being-there” on the abyss of Nothingness, or a sham philology passing Plato for a Machiavellian. These (paradigmatic) word-games are in essence instruments of power, as well as Trojan horses that have contrabanded anti-traditional Gnostic myth into the walled perimeter of an area hitherto guarded ever more dubiously by monotheistic orthodoxy.

The present situation is not encouraging. While the process of “homogenization” (i.e., globalization) proceeds apace, and so does the centralization of policy making, the Churches have given way to this Gnostic onslaught, and dissent has disappeared. The state of war is chronic. Academia in the West is for the most part indentured to Big Business, and the only way out would appear to be an appeal to civil engagement at the grass roots—in the cities, towns, and villages of our nations. As mentioned previously, a number of important regional initiatives have been active in several parts of the world. By means of legislation designed to shelter local industry and entrepreneurship, we might look forward to creating a social base upon which a true universal trade of ideas, mutualism, and goods could be established. It is then our hope that, relying on our innate desire to “help the world,” we shall succeed in recreating a wholesome movement of dissent across all divides, which will enable us to oppose war, to resist the flattening force of these corporate interests of globalization, and to defeat in our society the empires and reigns of discursive terror.

