Postmodernism

*Search For Answers*

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The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalog (5th Ed.), by James W. Sire
Worldviews Revisited Series

• Introduction to Worldviews (10/25/15)
• Christian Theism, Deism, Islamic Theism (11/01/15)
• Naturalism, Nihilism (11/08/15)
• Existentialism (11/15/15)
• Eastern Pantheistic Monism (11/22/15)
• The New Age (11/29/15)
• Postmodernism (12/06/15)
• How Shall We Then Live? (12/13/15)
What is a Worldview?

“A worldview is a commitment, a fundamental orientation of the heart, that can be expressed as a story or in a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true or entirely false) which we hold (consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) about the basic constitution of reality, and that provides the foundation on which we live and move and have our being.”

Eight Basic Questions

1. What is the prime reality – the really real?
2. What is the nature of external reality, that is, the world around us?
3. What is a human being?
4. What happens to a person after death?
5. Why is it possible to know anything at all?
6. How do we know what is right and wrong?
7. What is the meaning of human history?
8. What personal, life-orienting core commitments are consistent with this worldview?

Postmodernism

The Vanished Horizon
“The Slide…and the Leap”

- Christian Theism
- Deism
- Theistic Existentialism
- God
- Atheistic Existentialism
- Naturalism
- New Age
- Pantheistic Monism
- Brahman
- Buddhism
- The Void
- Hinduism
- Postmodernism
Nietzsche’s Parable of the Madman

‘Whither is God,” he [the madman] cried. “I shall tell you. We have killed him—you and I. All of us are his murderers. But how have we done this? How were we able to drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? . . . Are we not straying as through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space? . . . Do we not smell anything yet of God’s decomposition? Gods too decompose. God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him. How shall we, the murderers of all murderers, comfort ourselves? . . . I come too early,” he said then; “my time has not come yet. This tremendous event is still on its way, still wandering—it has not yet reached the ears of man.’

- Friedrich Nietzsche, “The Madman” (The Gay Science, 1882)

“In a brilliant parable written over a hundred years ago, Friedrich Nietzsche saw it all. A culture cannot lose its philosophic center without the most serious of consequences, not just to the philosophy on which it was based but to the whole superstructure of culture and even each person’s notion of who he or she is. Everything changes. When God dies, both the substance and the value of everything else die too.”

Sire on Nietzsche

“The acknowledgment of the death of God is the beginning of postmodern wisdom. It is also the end of postmodern wisdom. For, in the final analysis, postmodernism is not “post” anything; it is the last move of the modern, the result of the modern taking its own commitments seriously and seeing that they fail to stand the test of analysis.”

“Socrates said that the unexamined life is not worth living, but for a naturalist he is wrong. For a naturalist it is the examined life that is not worth living. Now, over a hundred years after Nietzsche, the news of God’s death has finally reached “the ears of man." The horizon defining the limits of our world has been wiped away. The center holding us in place has vanished.”

Sire’s Lament

“Our age, which more and more is coming to be called postmodern, finds itself afloat in a pluralism of perspectives, a plethora of philosophical possibilities, but with no dominant notion of where to do or how to act there. A near future of cultural anarchy seems inevitable.”

“Enough gloomy talk. This book is supposed to be a catalog of worldviews. Catalogs should be dispassionate. Get a grip! Getting a grip is hard. How does one define the indefinite? Certainly the term that now fits is postmodernism. But what does it mean? It is used by so many people to focus on so many different facets of cultural and intellectual life that its meaning is often fuzzy, not just around the edges, but at the center as well (as if a term defining a worldview without a center could have a center).”

What is Postmodernism?

‘In short, [Jean-Francois] Lyotard defined postmodern as "incredulity toward metanarratives." No longer is there a single story, a metanarrative (in our terms a worldview), that holds Western culture together. It is not just that there have long been many stories, each of which gives its binding power to the social group that takes it as its own. The naturalists have their story, the pantheists theirs, the Christians theirs, ad infinitum.’

Another Definition

“Postmodernism moves beyond the ‘modern’, scientifically based view of the world by blending a scepticism about technology, objectivity, absolutes, and total explanations with a stress on image and appearance, personal interpretation, pleasure and the exploration of every spiritual and material perspective.” - E. David Cook

Source: E. David Cook, Blind Alley Beliefs (1996)
Yet Another Definition

If Descartes is seen as the father of modernism, then postmodernism is a variety of cultural positions which reject major features of Cartesian (or allegedly Cartesian) modern thought. Hence, views which, for example, stress the priority of the social to the individual; which reject the universalizing tendencies of philosophy; which prize irony over knowledge; and which give the irrational equal footing with the rational in our decision procedures all fall under the postmodern umbrella.

Two Major Shifts in Perspective

Premodern
A just society based on revelation from a just God

Universal reason as a guide to justice

Modern

Despair of any universal standard for justice

Postmodern

Two Major Shifts in Perspective

- **Being**
  - Faith seeking understanding
  - Saint Anselm of Canterbury (1033–1109)

- **Knowing**
  - Autonomy of human reason
  - René Descartes (1596–1650)

- **Meaning**
  - Conceptual relativism in every area of knowledge
  - Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900)

A Question about the Questions

‘The first question postmodernism addresses is not what is there or how we know what is there but how language functions to construct meaning. In other words, there has been a shift in "first things" from being to knowing to constructing meaning.’

Question #1

What is the prime reality – the really real?

(N, PM) Prime reality is matter. Matter exists eternally and is all there is. God does not exist.

Question #2

What is the nature of external reality, that is, the world around us?

(PM)

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What is a human being?

(PM) Stories give communities their cohesive character. There is no substantial self. Human beings make themselves who they are by the languages they construct about themselves.

Question #4

What happens to a person after death?

(PM)

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Question #5

Why is it possible to know anything at all?

(PM) The truth about the reality itself is forever hidden from us. All we can do is tell stories.

All narratives mask a play for power. Any one narrative used as a metanarrative is oppressive.

How do we know what is right and wrong?

(PM) All narratives mask a play for power. Any one narrative used as a metanarrative is oppressive. Ethics, like knowledge, is a linguistic construct. Social good is whatever society takes it to be.

(PM) Postmodernism is in flux, as is postmodernism's take on the significance of human history, including its own history. This means that the core commitments of many postmodernists are in flux as well. Postmodernists, in short are committed to an endless stream of shifting "whatevers."

What personal, life-orienting core commitments are consistent with this worldview?

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Four Key Figures in Postmodern Philosophy

• Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) – *Deconstruction of texts*, “Nothing is out-of-context”
• Michel Foucault (1926-1984) – *Power and discourse*
• Jean-François Lyotard (1924-1998) – “Incredulity towards metanarratives”
• Richard Rorty (1931-2007) – *Neopragmatism, skeptical of science knowing reality*

Source: Original research
Two Key Figures in Postmodern Theology

• Brian McLaren (1956 - ) – Emerging Church movement, postmodern Christianity, Author of *A New Kind of Christian* (Jossy-Bass, 2001)

• Tony Jones (1968 - ) – Author of *Postmodern Youth Ministry: Exploring Cultural Shift, Cultivating Authentic Community, Creating Holistic Connections* (Zondervan, 2001)

*Source: Original research*
The Emerging Church

The emerging church is a Christian movement of the late 20th and early 21st centuries that crosses a number of theological boundaries: participants are described as Protestant, post-Protestant, evangelical, post-evangelical, liberal, post-liberal, conservative, post-conservative, anabaptist, adventist, reformed, charismatic, neocharismatic, and post-charismatic. Emerging churches can be found throughout the globe, predominantly in North America, Western Europe, Australia, New Zealand, and Africa. Some attend local independent churches or house churches while others worship in traditional Christian denominations.

Source: “Emerging church”, Wikipedia, accessed 12/05/2015
The Emerging Church

Proponents believe the movement transcends such "modernist" labels of "conservative" and "liberal," calling the movement a "conversation" to emphasize its developing and decentralized nature, its vast range of standpoints, and its commitment to dialogue. Participants seek to live their faith in what they believe to be a "postmodern" society. What those involved in the conversation mostly agree on is their disillusionment with the organized and institutional church and their support for the deconstruction of modern Christian worship, modern evangelism, and the nature of modern Christian community.

Source: “Emerging church”, Wikipedia, accessed 12/05/2015
The Emerging Church

• *Relevants* are theological conservatives who are interested in updating to current culture. They look to people like Dan Kimball and Donald Miller.

• *Reconstructionists* are generally theologically evangelical, and speak of new forms of church that result in transformed lives. They look to Neil Cole, Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch.

• *Revisionists* are theologically liberal, and openly question whether evangelical doctrine is appropriate for the postmodern world. They look to leaders such as Brian McLaren, Rob Bell and Doug Pagitt.

*Source: “Emerging church”, Wikipedia, accessed 12/05/2015*
Strange Bedfellows

A Christian Apologist and a New Atheist agree on Postmodernism
The idea that we live in a postmodern culture is a myth. In fact, a postmodern culture is an impossibility; it would be utterly unlivable. People are not relativistic when it comes to matters of science, engineering, and technology; rather, they are relativistic and pluralistic in matters of religion and ethics. But, of course, that's not postmodernism; that's modernism! That's just old-line verificationism, which held that anything you can't prove with your five senses is a matter of personal taste. We live in a culture that remains deeply modernist. Otherwise, how do we make sense of the popularity of the New Atheism?

Daniel Dennett on Postmodernism

“Postmodernism, the school of 'thought' that proclaimed 'There are no truths, only interpretations' has largely played itself out in absurdity, but it has left behind a generation of academics in the humanities disabled by their distrust of the very idea of truth and their disrespect for evidence, settling for 'conversations' in which nobody is wrong and nothing can be confirmed, only asserted with whatever style you can muster.“

Appendix
Two-Story Dichotomy

FAITH (NONREASON—OPTIMISM)

THE RATIONAL (PESSIMISM)

Modernism

THE NONRATIONAL AND NONLOGICAL

religion, ethics

science, technology, engineering

THE RATIONAL AND LOGICAL

Source: Based on Schaeffer’s two stories diagram
Soli Deo Gloria

http://searchforanswers.org