Reference:
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مابعد الحداثة

ستيفن بست ودوجلاس كلنر

في عالم الفلسفة والخطابات النظرية الأخرى، هناك مسارات عديدة مختلفة للتحول من الحداثي إلى مابعد الحداثي، تمثل جينيولوجيا معقدة لتداعيات متنوعة، وأحيانا متباعدة، للمجالات العلمية والثقافية المختلفة. أحد المسارات يتحرك من خلال تقليد لاعقلاني من الرومانسية إلى الوجودية إلى مابعد الحداثة الفرنسية من خلال شخصيات مثل نيتشه، هايدجر، وباتايي (Bataille) إلى انتشار النظرية الفرنسية لمابعد الحداثة. هذا المسار رسمه يورجين هابرماس في "الخطاب الفلسفي للحداثة" (1987)، وهو مسار يقود بالنسبة إليه إلى نقطة نهاية ميتة للاعقلانية وكارثة الفاشية.

تتضمن الروايات الأكثر إيجابية لجينيولوجيا تداعيات مابعد الحداثة من الناحية النظرية رحلة ريتشار كيرني (Reachard Kearny) من خلال تقدم حالات الفكر ما قبل الحداثي، الحداثي، ما بعد الحداثي إلى نجاح خيال ورؤية مابعد حداثية جديدة (١٩٨٨). كذلك بشكل مغروس بعمق في النظرية الجمالية، يصف إيهاب حسن (١٩٨٧) الخطوط العامة لثقافة مابعد حداثية "للاعمل" "unmaking" والتي تنبثق من خلال الحداثة، البرجماتية، والتغيرات في العلم الحديث، والتي، في أفضل الحالات، سوف تساعد على تقدم رؤية وليام جيمس لـ "عالم متعدد غير مكتمل". بدوره يحكي جون ماكجوان "John McGowan" (١٩٩١) قصة انبثاق نظريات مابعد بنيوية "poststructuralist"، ماركسية جديدة "neo-Marxist"، وبرجماتية جديدة "neo-pragmatist" لمابعد الحداثة والتي تنشأ من تقليد كانت، هيجل، ماركس، ونيتشه، تبني على، ولكنها تتعدى حدود، سابقيها. تضع العديد من التصورات عن التحول إلى مابعد الحداثة أفضلية لنيتشه وهايدجر باعتبارهما المبشرين الأساسيين للتحول إلى مابعد الحداثة والذين استحدثا حالات نقدية وجديدة من التفكير، أشكال جديدة للكتابة، وقيم تحررية (Vattimo, 1988; Kolb, 1990)، مقدمين دوران إيجابي حول التحول إلى مابعد الحداثة في الفلسفة.

نحن نبين في هذه الدراسة كيف أن التقديرات المختلفة للفرضيات الأساسية لفلسفة الحداثة بواسطة كيركجارد، نيتشه، وهايدجر أفرزت صيغ مستفزة من الخطاب، الكتابات، والنقد مابعد الحداثي. قامت مجموعة من المفكرين الفرنسيين في السبعينيات بالاشتراك مع مفكري مابعد البنيوية "poststructuralists" بتقديم نقد جذري لفلسفة الحداثة وأصبحوا يعرفون بمنظري "مابعد الحداثة" (بست وكلنر "Best and Kellner"، ١٩٩١). طور دريدا، فوكو، ليوتار، بودريارد، وأخرون صيغا مبتكرة ومتحدية للتفكير والكتابة، دافعين الفلسفة إلى مجالات وموضوعات جديدة. في الثمانينيات، انتشرت نظرية مابعد الحداثة في العالم، وأصبح المفكر الأمريكي ريتشارد رورتي أيضا مرتبطا بالتحول إلى مابعد الحداثة في الفلسفة. رافضين كل من الاستبعاد الإجمالي والتأكيد الحماسي لفكر مابعد الحداثة، نتبنى مقاربة جدلية تتوسط ما بين النظرية الحداثية وتلك مابعد الحداثية حتى نطور نظرية نقدية وسياسية للعصر الحاضر. نحن نجادل بأنه بينما تحمل نظرية مابعد الحداثة نقدا

جذريا وبعض الأفكار البناءة لنظرية وسياسات الحداثة، إلا أنها فسدت نتيجة رفضها شديد التطـرف للمنظورات المعيارية وللنظرية الحداثية، ولذلك نحن ندعو إلى التوسط بين الخطابات الحداثية ومابعد الحداثية.[1]

النظرية الحداثية وهجوم كييركجارد على العقل

فلسفة الحداثة كانت إلى درجة كبيرة علمانية وإنسانية، مركزة على قـدرات البـشر علـى اكتشاف الحقائق الطبيعية والاجتماعية و بناء عالمهم طبقا لذلك. يفترض المنظرون الحـداثيون أن هناك نظاما وقوانين في الكون والمجتمع يمكن أن يكتشفها العقل حتى يمكن أن يتمثل ويـتحكم فـي الطبيعة والظروف الاجتماعية. يعتبر العقل هو القدرة الإنسانية المميزة، القدرة المعرفية التي يمكـن أن تمكن الإنسان من الهيمنة على الطبيعة وخلق المجتمعـات الأخلاقيـة والعادلـة. ولـد الإيمـان بالعقلانية خلال مرحلتي النهضة "Renaissance" والثورة العلمية في القرنين السادس والسابع عشر، وتوجت بتنوير القرن الثامن عشر، وانتصرت، بشكل لم يخل من التحدي، في القرن التاسع عـشر. على أية حال، وضع مفكرو القرن التاسع عشر الرئيسيين مثل كييركجارد، ونيتشه، دعـاوى العقـل ونظرية الحداثة محل تساؤل، معبدين الطريق، بذلك، نحو تحول مابعد حداثي في الفلسفة.

حمل الفيلسوف الدانمركي المتدين سورين كييركجارد نقدا منهجيا لادعاوى العقل والعقلانيـة المجردة التي اعتقد أن العصر الحديث يغذيها. مدينا التفكير المجرد باعتباره "خطرا" يوقع الناس في شرك الإعاقات المنطقية والميكانيكية، قارنها كييركجارد بالسجن. التفكير المجرد بالنسبة له هو نوع من الأسر، رابطة لا يمكن كسرها إلا بواسطة الشعور الديني [العـاطفي] الـداخلي (١٩٧٨، ٨١). التفكير يغري الأفراد بالتفكير في أن إمكانياته هي "أكثر سموا من القرارات الرديئـة" (١٩٧٨، ص ٨٢). إنها تقودهم إلى الفعل "طبقا للمبادئ"، للانهماك في تدبر سياق أفعـالهم وحـساب قيمتهـا أو نتائجها. يجادل كييركجارد بأن ذلك يستبعد الإحساس، الإلهام، والتلقائية، والتي هي ضرورية بشكل حاسم للوجود الداخلي الحقيقي ولعلاقة حيوية بالإله. بالنسبة لكييركجارد، وكما سوف يتفـق معـه لاحقا نيتشه، الوجود الداخلي الحقيقي (والثقافة) يتميز بكونه مشدودا إلى الروح التي تميز الوجـود العاطفي. ولكن "العلاقات المعقدة لينابيع الحياة... تفقد مرونتها" مـع التفكيـر (١٩٧٨, ص ٧٨)، و"يصبح كل شيء خارجي بلا معنى، مفرغا من الشخصية [الداخلية]" (١٩٧٨، ص ٦٢).

يساهم كييركجارد بذلك في تطوير تقليد لاعقلاني والذي سيكون له صدى في الفكر مابعـد الحداثي اللاحق. يمكن أن يكون كييركجارد قد اتفق مع معاصره فيودور دوستويفسكي الذي كتب: "لا يمكن للشخص الذكي [المفكر] أن يصبح حقيقة أي شيء...الوعي الزائد هو مـرض" (١٩٤٧، ص ٣،٥). في عصر محمل بالقواعد والنظم، الفعل الحقيقي – الذي يفترض كييركجارد أنه ذاتي وتلقائي – هو محبط في كل خطوة. متذمرا من أننا "جادون وملتزمون" جدا (١٩٧٨, ص ٧١) حتـى فـي الولائم، ينعي كييركجارد حقيقة أنه حتى حالات الانتحار يتم التفكير فيها مسبقا. (١٩٧٨، ص ٦٨)! "أن يتوقف أو يقع شخص ما في أفعاله أصبح أمرا مستبعدا؛ بدلا من ذلك، كل شخص يجلس ويفعل عملا باهرا، هو في النهاية أخرق، بمساعدة بعض التفكير وكذلك بواسطة إعـلان أنهـم جمـيعهم يعرفون جيدا ماذا يجب أن يفعل" (١٩٧٨، ص ٧٣). وهكذا، العاطفة، وليس التفكير، التي تـضمن "علاقة تواضع لائقة بين الإنسان والإنسان وتمنع العدائيـة الخـشنة" (١٩٧٨، ص ٦٢). اسـتبعد العاطفة وستختفي أيضا اللياقة" (١٩٧٨، ص ٦٤)".

الغموض في كلمة "عاطفة" يمكن أن يؤدي إلى بعض الارتباك هنا. القول بأنه لـيس لـدى العصر وأفراده "عاطفة" ليس معناه القول بأنه ليس هناك عاطفة من أي نوع، وإنما، لـيس هنـاك

روحانية داخلية حقيقية في العمق، ليس هناك أفعال لها دافع داخلي قوي وملتزم. هذا القول يقترح أن العاطفة توجد فقط في تمثيل شبه شكلي "إعادة ميلاد العاطفة" من خلال "الثرثرة" (١٩٧٨، ص ٦٤). التعبير التلفائي "Chattering" بالنسبة لكيركجارد يقف في وجه "التحدث المثالي" و"يعكس" الأحداث غير المنطقية (١٩٧٨، ص ٨٩-٩٩). لذلك في "عصرنا الحالي" تحولت العاطفة – والتي ينطق بها في الحقيقة كثيرا – إلى قوة سلبية.[٢] مستبقا جينيولوجيا نيتشه المتعلقة بـ"تمرد العبد" في الأخلاقيات، يدعي كيركجارد أن "تعصب" العصر السابق للثورة، باعتباره "المبدأ الإيجابي الموحد" قد أصبح "جسدا" فارغا من المعنى، "مبدأ سلبي موحد" (١٩٧٨، ص ٨١)، قوة مسوية مستقلة بذاتها بقدر ما أن هؤلاء الذين يفتقدون الموهبة والموارد يريدون أن يقطعوا هؤلاء الذين يملكونها.

يرجع كل من كيركجارد ونيتشه سياسات المساواة إلى حقد الدهماء للنبيل القوى. ومع ذلك يرتفع كيركجارد بشكل منتظم بالعاطفة على العقل. بالنسبة إلى كيركجارد، هناك ثلاثة مراحل للوجود – الجمالي، الأخلاقي، والديني. في كل من هذه المراحل، تعتبر العاطفة والعناصر غير العقلانية ذات قيمة أعلى من العقلانية. في المرحلة الجمالية، تقدم اللذة الحسية ذات الطعم المطبخي، الفن، والشهوة الجنسية المباهج الأرضية للحياة اليومية، وليس ميكانيكية العقل. في المرحلة الأخلاقية، يقيم كيركجارد عاطفة العزيمة، الاختيار، والالتزام على المبادئ الكونية وقدرة الحكم الأخلاقي. المرحلة الدينية، على كل حال، هي أعلى حالات الوجود بالنسبة لكيركجارد، الذي ينتصر للعاطفة اللامحدودة لاختيار الاعتقاد المسيحي، الإيمان اللاعقلاني بأسرار ومفارقات المسيحية، والحنين الذاتي للانعتاق والفداء كقلب وروح الحياة الدينية.

أكثر من ذلك "الحقيقة هي الذاتية" بالنسبة لكيركجارد، الذي يهلل للعاطفة الذاتية والالتزام حيث تعيش الذات المسيحية في الحقيقة، جاعلا منها الصورة والجوهر للحياة اليومية. مثل هذه الحقائق الوجودية لها قيمة أكثر بكثير بالنسبة لكيركجارد من دعاوى الفلسفة والعلم. على وجه الخصوص، يتهكم كيركجارد على هيجل ودعاواه عن الحقيقة الموضوعية المطلقة التي يتم تحصيلها من خلال منظومة كلية للمعرفة. بالمثل، يسخر كيركجارد من ضمانات عقل التنوير والعلم الحديث في تقديم مناهج معصومة من الخطأ تؤدي إلى الوصول إلى المعرفة الموضوعية. مثل هذه "الحقائق" بالنسبة لكيركجارد، لم يكن لها سوى مردود وجودي محدود بالمقارنة مع متع وتبصرات الفن، واجبات الالتزام الأخلاقي، والقيمة اللانهائية وغير القابلة للتعبير للفداء الديني.

بالنسبة لكيركجارد، الموضوع كان موناد واحدي "solipsistic monad"، يحن إلى الانعتاق والسعادة اللانهائية، معذب بالقلق والذنب، مهووس بالإله والعلو الديني. الروابط الاجتماعية، الجماعة، صور الترابط التي تقدرها النظرية الاجتماعية الحديثة باعتبارها انجازات متميزة للحداثة، مع أشكال التكامل الاجتماعي، والقيم المجتمعية، جميعها تطايرت لتصبح عصر طيفي من جمهور شبحي، يترك الفرد في خوف وارتعاش، وحيدا أمام الإله وعاطفة الاختيار الديني. لذلك، يحمل كيركجارد نقدا للعقل، التفكير، المعرفة الموضوعية، والفكر الحداثي الذي سوف يترك بصمته على التحول إلى مابعد الحداثة في الفلسفة.

Nietzsche and the Postmodern

Nietzsche shares Kierkegaard's belief that contemporary thought, morality, and religion are contributing to the leveling process, but unlike Kierkegaard, who has positive conceptions of morality and religion, Nietzsche tends to see all existing forms of morality and religion – and Christianity in particular – as repressive of vital life energies and inimical to individuality. Thus Nietzsche radicalizes the Enlightenment critique of ideology and, like Marx, advocates a relentlessly secular approach to values and theory. Nietzsche's philosophical critique mutated into modern existentialism and then postmodern theory, making him a master theorist of both traditions and a link from existentialism to the postmodern turn in philosophy. In particular, Nietzsche anticipated later postmodern theory in his critique of the subject and reason, his deconstruction of modern notions of truth, representation, and objectivity, his perspectivism, and his highly aestheticized philosophy and mode of writing. Nietzsche's celebration of the Dionysian and his critiques of Socratic reason and later rationalist Greek tragedy present an attack on figures of Enlightenment rationality and modern science. Nietzsche later makes it clear that the Socratic, or "theoretic man," who was the target of his critique in *Birth of Tragedy*, stands for modern science and rationality, and in the section "Attempt at a self-criticism" of this earlier work, Nietzsche claims that "it was *the problem of science itself*, science considered for the first time as problematic, as questionable," which distinguishes his position (1967a, p. 18). Indeed, Nietzsche led the way in questioning the value of science for life, suggesting that the "will to truth" and scientific lust for objectivity are masks for a will to power and advancement of ascetic ideals (1968a). Moreover, although it is often not noted, Nietzsche was one of the first to attack the organization of modern society and to develop a critique of modernity.[3]

From his early writings on, Nietzsche, like Kierkegaard, rails against a life-denying rationalism and idealist philosophy which champions reason over the passions. Nietzsche interprets the "subject" as a mere construct, an idealized sublimation of bodily drives, experiences, and a multiplicity of thoughts and impulses. This "little changeling," on Nietzsche's view, this subject, "is believed in more firmly than anything else on earth," but is for him a simple illusion created out of modern desperation to have a well-grounded identity. Belief in the subject is promoted by the exigencies of grammar which utilize a subject/predicate form, giving rise to the fallacy that the "I" is a substance, whereas it is really only a convention of grammar(Nietzsche, 1968b, pp. 37–8). For Nietzsche, "the doer" is "merely a fiction added

to the deed – the deed is everything" (1968b, p. 45). "The subject," he concludes, is thus but a shorthand expression for a multiplicity of drives, experiences, and ideas. In the spirit of Enlightenment, Nietzsche also polemicizes against metaphysics, arguing that it illicitly generalizes from ideas in one historical epoch to the entirety of history. Against this form of philosophical universalism, Nietzsche argues "there are *no eternal facts*, just as there are no absolute truths. Consequently, what is needed from now on *is historical philosophizing*, and with it the virtue of modesty" (Nietzsche, 1986, p. 13). Castigating traditional philosophy and values from a critical Enlightenment perspective, Nietzsche anticipates later postmodern critiques of metaphysics, assailing the concept of enduring knowledge, the notion of a transcendental world, and presenting metaphysical thought as a thoroughly obsolete mode of thinking. He attributes the "metaphysical need," at the heart of philosophies such as that of Schopenhauer, to primitive yearnings for religious consolation for the sufferings of life, and he urges "free spirits" to liberate themselves and pursue thinking and living *experimentally* (1986, p. 8).

Nietzsche's attack on foundationalism, universalizing thought, and metaphysics thus undertakes a "postmodern" turn in philosophy through a radical deconstruction of modern theory. But while deconstructionist philosophies typically terminate in the No, merely seeking to unravel a positive modern value system into a heap of disconnected fragments, Nietzsche starts and finishes with a big Yes, a life-affirming value, deconstructing only to reconstruct. Moving far away from Schopenhauerian pessimism, back toward a Greek view of tragedy, toward a Dionysian view of existence, Nietzsche seeks "a *justification of life*, even at its most terrible, ambiguous, and mendacious" (1968a, p. 521), a justification found in art, creativity, independence, and the emergence of "higher types" of humanity.

Yet Nietzsche's perspectivism denies the possibility of affirming any absolute or universal values: all ideas, values, positions, and so on are posits of individual constructs of a will to power, which are to be judged according to the extent to which they do or do not serve the values of life, creativity, and strong individuality. For Nietzsche there are no facts, only interpretations, and he argues that all interpretation is constituted by the individual's perspectives and is thus inevitably laden with presuppositions, biases, and limitations. For Nietzsche, a perspective is thus an optic, a way of seeing, and the more perspectives one has at one's disposal, the more one can see, and the better one can understand and grasp specific phenomena. To avoid limited and partial vision one should learn "how to employ a *variety* of perspectives and interpretations in the service of knowledge" (Nietzsche, 1968a, p. 119).

The concepts of perspectival seeing and interpretation provide Nietzsche with a critical counter-concept to essentialism: objects do not have an inherent essence, but will appear differently according to the perspective from which they are viewed and interpreted and the context in which they appear. He describes his own "search for knowledge" as manifested in the dream of having the "hands and eyes" of many others and of being "reborn in a hundred beings" (1974, p. 215). Cultivating this approach requires *learning to see* and interpret – "habituating the eye to repose, to

patience, to letting things come to it; learning to defer judgement, to investigate and comprehend the individual case in all its aspects" (Nietzsche, 1968b, p. 65).

This passage points to another virtue of a perspectival optic: learning to grasp the specificity and particularity of things. Nietzsche mistrusted the distorting function of language and concepts which are overly abstract and general, and he required perspectival seeing and interpretation to grasp the uniqueness of concrete phenomena.

Perspectival seeing allows access to "a complex form of specificity" (Nietzsche, 1968a, p. 340), which makes possible a more concrete and complete grasp of the particularities of phenomena. Seeing from conflicting perspectives also opens people to appreciation of otherness and difference, and enables them to grasp the uncertain, provisional, hypothetical and "experimental" nature of all knowledge.

Nietzsche's Progeny and the Postmodern Turn: From Heidegger through Derrida

Nietzsche's legacy is highly complex and contradictory, and in retrospect he is one of the most important and enigmatic figures in the transition from modern to postmodern thought. His assault on Western rationalism profoundly influenced Heidegger, Derrida, Deleuze, Foucault, Lyotard, and other postmodern theorists who broke with modern theory and sought alternative theories. Martin Heidegger, for instance, combines Nietzsche's radical critique of modernity with nostalgia for premodern social forms and a hatred of modern technology, which he sees as producing powerful forms of domination. In *Being and Time* (1962 [1927]), Heidegger develops Kierkegaard's and Nietzsche's critique of the masses and mass society through his concept of *das Man*, the impersonal One, or They-Self, which dominates "average everyday" being. The They-Self for Heidegger is a form of tyranny that imposes the thought, tastes, language, and habits of the mass onto each individual, creating a leveling process, such that "authentic" individuality demands radical selfdifferentiation from others (see Kellner, 1973). The process is facilitated by meditation on death and the contingency and finitude of human existence, which lends an urgency to creative endeavors.

For the later Heidegger, the critical focus shifted from the existential structures of individual existence and modern society to modern technology, which generates a *Gestell*, a conceptual framework that reduces nature, human beings, and objects to "a standing reserve," as resources for technical exploitation. Heidegger renounces modern and technological modes of thought and values in favor of premodern forms of contemplation and "letting Being be," thus rejecting modernity in its totality (1977). Like Nietzsche, he ultimately harkens back to premodern values, and with Ernst Junger, Oswald Spengler, and others he furthers a German anti-rationalist tradition that ultimately helped to produce fascism, an anti-modern culture that Heidegger affirmed and promoted.

Heidegger's assault on modernity was developed by Foucault and assorted postmodern theorists, while his attacks on metaphysics and modern thought became

central to Derrida. Heidegger argues that modern subjectivity sets itself up as a sovereign instrument of domination of the object and that its own forms of representing the world are taken as the measure of the real (1977). For Heidegger, the representational form of modern thought and subsequent subject–object metaphysics illicitly enthrones the subject as the Lord of Being and positions individuals into an inauthentic relation with Being. Derrida radicalizes Heidegger's strike against dualistic metaphysics, while Rorty (1980) develops Heidegger's account of representation into a critique of philosophy as the mirror of nature. These ideas would eventually coalesce into a radical negation of modern philosophy, leading many to call for novel modes of postmodern thought and writing.

In the 1960s, various post-humanist and anti-metaphysical discourses emerged under the rubric of poststructuralism and, later, postmodern theory. These movements were premised on attacks on the Cartesian subject, Enlightenment views of history, and systemic or "totalizing" modes of modern thought that sought overarching unities and continuities in society and history. Although a spate of interesting thinkers such as Gilles Deleuze, Roland Barthes, Jean Baudrillard, and Julia Kristeva grew out of this ferment, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Jean-François Lyotard, and Richard Rorty emerged as perhaps the major philosophical figures in the postmodern turn in philosophy.

These thinkers were resolute historicists who assailed timeless metaphysical notions such as "Being" and overturned the Cartesian view of the subject in different ways, each taking a version of "the linguistic turn" (Rorty) in philosophy and social theory. Derrida attacks notions such as center, totality, and structure (1973, 1976, 1981a,b). For Derrida, difference is at the heart of everything: language has meaning only through a linguistic chain of differentiations. There is no immediate access to reality, no "transcendental signified" not mediated through a socially constituted language. In a linguistically created world of human meaning, there is nothing but an endless chain of signifiers, or "intertextuality."

Central to Derrida's thought is the attack on metaphysics. From his perspective, the entire Western legacy of philosophical thinking is Platonic/metaphysical in that it seeks to erase time, history, difference, and contingency from the world. Western philosophy seeks flight to an imaginary realm of pure and timeless universals, as it attempts to discover foundations for truth and stable values. Philosophical concepts such as "Forms," "clear and distinct ideas," "Absolute Knowledge," and the "transcendental subject" all seek to stop the dissemination of meaning within a closed system of "truth." This repression of meaning inevitably leads the metaphysical texts of Western philosophy into paradoxes, contradictions, and incoherencies that are ripe for "deconstruction."

To "deconstruct" is not the same as to destroy. Deconstruction attempts to undo logical contradictions and overturn rigid conceptual oppositions, while releasing new concepts and meanings that could not be included in the old system. At the heart of Western metaphysics, for example, Derrida finds the opposition between "speech" and "writing." This binary logic functions in an illicit way to establish speech as the means of giving "presence" to the world, while writing is deemed derivative and inferior. In Derrida's sense of "grammatology," however, all production of meaning is writing and subject to the infinite play of signification. By taking away

the transcendental signified and advancing the concept of "differance" (language organized around difference and deferred, or mediated, understandings), Derrida, like Nietzsche, wants to leave us without transcendental illusions, metaphysical unities, and foundations that constrain thought and creativity.

Western culture for Derrida is pervaded by philosophy; its binary modes of thought are constitutive of its literature, science, morality, and imperialist politics. Philosophy itself is contaminated by metaphysics and moves of exclusion; to undo the logic behind the exclusion, to challenge the metaphysical underpinnings of the culture, is to put in question the culture itself. Ideology relies on two key metaphysical strategies: it constructs dualisms and hierarchies, and it seeks an absolute grounding point to derive one thing from another. Thus, dualisms are not innocent: one term (white/male/Western) is always privileged over another (person of color/female/non-Western); the superior term is not possible without contrast to the inferior term. The thrust of deconstruction clearly is normative and political: it is a protest against marginalization, the violence that isolates and silences a plurality of voices in the name of a hegemonic power or authority, and it inverts the dominant and valorizes the suppressed.

In this light, Derrida has taken many positions as an "engaged intellectual." He has attacked apartheid, supported Nelson Mandela, helped start an open university in Paris, spoken out against human rights abuses, and addressed feminist issues. Derrida has publicly proclaimed himself a communist and has at times linked his work to Marxist concerns (which is not to say that he is a Marxist or that deconstruction is a Marxist method; see Derrida, 1994). He has lashed out against apolitical interpretations of his work. But from what position can deconstruction speak, if there is no ground, if everything is indeterminate? Like Foucault, Derrida has no cognitive means of supporting his own position and no positive evaluative norms. Rather, his emphasis is on skepticism, destabilization, uprooting, and overturning.

The deconstructive emphasis of Derrida, Foucault, Lyotard, Rorty and others underscores one of the main deficits of postmodern theory – the failure to provide normative resources for ethics and political critique. This creates a strange paradox, one that Habermas (1987) terms a "performative contradiction," whereby the postmodern theorist assails modern theories and societies, yet renounces the resources to justify the critique as better, superior, or even accurate. As we see in the following sections, this problem afflicts key postmodern theorists such as Foucault, Lyotard, and Rorty.

Foucault's Critique of Rationality and Modernity

Foucault's works have been extremely influential in all fields of contemporary criticism, inspiring not only the "new historicism," but also innovative research in the areas of the family, sexuality, social regulation, education, prisons, law, and the state.[4]

In a series of historical studies on madness and psychiatry, illness and medicine, the human sciences, prisons and punishment, sexuality, and ethics, Foucault redefines the

nature of social theory by calling into question conventional assumptions concerning the Enlightenment, Marxism, rationality, subjectivity, power, truth, history, and the political role of the intellectual. Foucault breaks with universalist, foundationalist, dialectical, and normative standpoints and emphasizes principles of contingency, difference, and discontinuity. Adopting a nominalist stance, he dissolves abstract essences and universals such as Reason, History, Truth, or Right into a plurality of specific sociohistorical forms.

Foucault challenges traditional disciplinary boundaries between philosophy, history, psychology, and social and political theory, as well as conventional approaches to these disciplines. He does not do "theory" in the modern sense that aims at clarity, consistency, comprehensiveness, objectivity, and truth; rather, he offers fragments, "fictions," "truth-games," "heterotopias," "tools," and "experiments" that he hopes will prompt us to think and act in new ways. Trying to blaze new intellectual and political trails, Foucault abandons both liberalism and Marxism and seeks a new kind of critical theory and politics.

By theorizing the connections between knowledge, truth, and power, such as emerged in the domain of the human sciences and are bound up with constituting individuals as distinct kinds of subjects, Foucault transforms the history of science and reason into a political critique of modernity and its various modes of power, which assume the form of "normalization" or "subjectification." Foucault holds to the Nietzschean view that to be a "subject" – that is, to have a unified and coherent identity – is to be "subjugated" by social powers. This occurs through a "deployment" of discourse that divides, excludes, classifies, creates hierarchies, confines, and normalizes thought and behavior. Hence, toward the end of his career, Foucault declares that his ultimate project has been not so much to study power but, rather, the subject itself: "the goal of my work . . . has been to create a history of the different modes by which, in our [Western] culture, human beings are made subjects" (1982, p. 208).

Yet this is a misleading distinction that signals merely a shift in emphasis rather than approach, since subjectification is the means through which modern power operates in Foucault's later writings. In a series of historical studies, Foucault analyzes the formation of the modern subject from the perspectives of psychiatry, medicine, criminology, and sexuality, whereby limit-experiences are transformed into objects of knowledge. His works are strongly influenced by an anti-Enlightenment tradition that rejects the equation of reason, emancipation, and progress. Foucault argues that an interface between modern forms of power and knowledge served to create new forms of domination. With thinkers such as Sade, Nietzsche, and Bataille, Foucault valorizes transgressive forms of experience, such as madness, violence, or sexuality, that break from the prison of rationality. Where modern societies "problematize" forms of experience such as madness, illness, and sexuality – that is, turn them into governmental problems, into areas of life in need of control and regulation – Foucault in turn queries the social construction of "problems" by uncovering their political motivations and effects and by challenging their character as natural, necessary, or timeless. In what he calls a "diagnostic critique" that combines philosophy and history (1989, pp. 38–9, 73), Foucault attempts to clarify the nature of the present historical era, to underline its radical difference from preceding eras, and to

show that contemporary forms of knowledge, rationality, social institutions, and subjectivity are contingent sociohistorical constructs of power and domination, and therefore are subject to change and modification.

Foucault's ultimate task, therefore, is "to produce a shift in thought so that things can really change" (quoted in O'Farrell, 1989, p. 39). The goal of Foucault's historico-philosophical studies, as he later came to define it, is to show how different domains of modern knowledge and practice constrain human action and how they can be transformed by alternative forms of knowledge and practice in the service of human freedom. Foucault is concerned to analyze various forms of the "limit-experience" whereby society attempts to define and circumscribe the boundaries of legitimate thought and action. The political vision informing Foucault's work foresees individuals liberated from coercive social norms, transgressing all limits to experience, and transvaluing values, going beyond good and evil, to promote their own creative lifestyles and affirm their bodies and pleasures, endlessly creating and recreatingthemselves.

Foucault denies there can be any basis for objective descriptive statements of social reality or universal normative statements that are not socially conditioned and locally bound. He tries to show that all norms, values, beliefs, and truth claims are relative to the discursive framework within which they originate. Any attempt to write or speak about the nature of things is made from within a rule-governed linguistic framework, an "episteme," that predetermines what kinds of statements are true or meaningful.

All forms of consciousness, therefore, are sociohistorically determined and relative to specific discursive conditions. There is no absolute, unconditioned, transcendental stance from which to grasp what is good, right, or true. Foucault refuses to specify what is true because there are no objective grounds of knowledge; he does not state what is good or right because he believes there is no universal standpoint from which to speak. Universal statements merely disguise the will to power of specific interests; all knowledge is perspectival in character. For postmodern theorists such as Foucault, the appeal to foundations is necessarily metaphysical and assumes the fiction of an Archimedean point outside of language and social conditioning.

Habermas (1987) rightly finds perplexing an approach that raises truth claims while destroying a basis for belief in truth, that takes normative positions while suppressing the values to which they are committed. For critique to be justified and effective, it should preserve standards by which to judge and evaluate, but Foucault's total critique turns against itself and calls all rational standards into question. In dissolving all social phenomena in the acid bath of power and domination, Foucault prevents critical theory from drawing crucial distinctions, such as those "between just and unjust social arrangements, legitimate and illegitimate uses of political power, strategic and cooperative interpersonal relations, coercive and consensual measures" (McCarthy, 1991, p. 54). One cannot say, for example, that one regime of power is any better or worse than another, only that they are different – "Another power, another knowledge" (Foucault, 1979, p. 226).

Since ruling powers attempt to erase such distinctions, or to present injustice as justice, falsehood as truth, and domination as freedom, Foucault's position unwittingly supports the mystifications of Orwellian doublespeak, now more rife than ever

(see Kellner, 2001), and blocks the discriminations necessary for social critique. If there are no standards or right, then, with Thrasymacus and Hobbes, we can conclude might is as right as anything. There can be no ideology critique where there is no distinction between true and false, and no social or moral critique without a distinction between right and wrong. The evaluative character of Foucault's own work is not any less normative for his refusal to explicitly confront it. The problem becomes glaring in his later work, where he employs normative terms such as liberty and autonomy, but fails to state what we should be free *for*. Foucault's antinormative stance therefore forces him into self-defeating value neutrality.

Foucault eschews normative positions in part because he wishes to renounce the role of the universal intellectual who legislates values. For Foucault, the task of the genealogist is to raise problems, not to give solutions; to shatter the old values, not to create new ones. Any stronger, more prescriptive role, Foucault argues, can only augment existing relations of power and reproduce hierarchical divisions between rulers and ruled. But Foucault's error is to confuse provisional normative statements with dogmatic ones, to conflate suggestions to be dialogically debated with finalized creeds to be imposed, to fail to see that universal values can be the products not only of power or ideology but also of consensual, rational, and free choice.[5] Consequently, like most postmodern thinkers, he fails to provide normative grounds for critique and positive ideals, a deficit addressed by Lyotard

Lyotard's "Postmodern Condition": Polemics and Aporia

While the early works of Jean-François Lyotard were strongly influenced by phenomenology, Marxism, and Nietzsche, in the 1980s he carried through a resolute postmodern turn in theory. In many circles, Lyotard is celebrated as *the* postmodern theorist *par excellence*. His book *The Postmodern Condition* (1984 [1979]) introduced the term to a broad public and has been widely discussed in the postmodern debates of the last decade. During this period, Lyotard published a series of books that promote postmodern positions in theory, ethics, politics, and aesthetics. More thanalmost anyone, Lyotard has championed a break with modern theory and methods, while popularizing and disseminating postmodern alternatives. As a result, his work has sparked a series of intense controversies (see Best and Kellner, 1991).

Above all, Lyotard has emerged as the champion of difference and plurality in all theoretical realms and discourses, while energetically attacking totalizing and universalizing theories and methods. In *The Postmodern Condition, Just Gaming* (1985 [1979]), *The Differend* (1988 [1983]), and a series of other books and articles published in the 1980s, he has called attention to the differences among the plurality of "regimes of phrases" which have their own rules, criteria, and methods. Stressing the heterogeneity of discourses, Lyotard argues, following Kant, that such domains as theoretical, practical, and aesthetic judgment have their own autonomy, rules, and criteria. In this way, he rejects notions of universalist and foundationalist theory, as well as claims that one method or set of concepts has privileged status in such disparate domains as philosophy, social theory, or aesthetics. Arguing against what he calls "terroristic" and "totalitarian" theory, Lyotard thus resolutely champions a plurality of discourses and positions against unifying theory.

In *The Postmodern Condition*, Lyotard turns affirmatively to postmodern discourse and sharpens his polemical attack against the discourses of modernity while offering new postmodern positions. In particular, he attempts to develop a postmodern epistemology that will replace the philosophical perspectives dominated by Western rationalism and instrumentalism. Subtitled *A Report on Knowledge*, the text was commissioned by the Canadian government to study

> the condition of knowledge in the most highly developed societies. I have decided to use the word *postmodern* to describe that condition. The word is in current use on the American continent among sociologists and critics; it designates the state of our culture following the transformations which, since the end of the nineteenth century, have altered the game rules for science, literature, and the arts. (Lyotard, 1984, p. xxiii)

Following our distinctions between postmodernity as a sociohistorical epoch, postmodernism as a configuration of art after/against modernism, and postmodern knowledge as a critique of modern epistemology (Best and Kellner, 1991, 1997), it would be more accurate to read Lyotard's text as a study of the conditions of postmodern knowledge, rather than of the postmodern condition *tout court*, for the text does not provide an analysis of postmodernity but, rather, compares modern and postmodern knowledge. Indeed, like Foucault, Lyotard carries out a critique of modern knowledge and calls for new knowledges, rather than developing analyses of postmodern forms of society or culture.

Consistent with his postmodern epistemology, he never theorizes modernity as a historical process, limiting himself to providing a critique of modern knowledge. Thus modernity for Lyotard is identified with modern reason, Enlightenment, totalizing thought, and philosophies of history. Failing to develop analyses of modernity and postmodernity, these notions are undertheorized in his work and this shifts postmodern theory away from social analysis and critique to philosophy. Lyotard thus carries through a linguistic and philosophical turn that renders his theory more and more abstract and distanced from the social realities and problems of the present age.

For Lyotard, there are three conditions for modern knowledge: the appeal to metanarratives to legitimate foundationalist claims; the inevitable outgrowth of legitimation, delegitimation, and exclusion; and a desire for homogeneous epistemological and moral prescriptions. Postmodern knowledge, by contrast, is against metanarratives and foundationalism; it eschews grand schemes of legitimation; and it is for heterogeneity, plurality, constant innovation, and pragmatic construction of local rules and prescriptives agreed upon by participants. The postmodern condition therefore involves developing an alternative epistemology that responds to new conditions of knowledge. The main focus of the book accordingly concerns the differences between the grand narratives of traditional philosophy and social theory, and what Lyotard calls "postmodern knowledge," which he defends as preferable to modern forms of knowledge.

To legitimate their positions, Lyotard claims that modern discourses appeal to metadiscourses such as the narrative of progress and emancipation, the dialectics of history or spirit, or the inscription of meaning and truth. Modern science, for instance, legitimates itself in terms of an alleged liberation from ignorance and superstition,

as well as the production of truth, wealth, and progress. From this perspective, the postmodern is defined by an "incredulity toward metanarratives," namely, the rejection of metaphysical philosophy, philosophies of history, and any form of totalizing thought – be it Hegelianism, liberalism, Marxism, or positivism.

Lyotard believes that the metanarratives of modernity tend toward exclusion and a desire for universal metaprescriptions. The scientist, for instance, provides a paradigmatic example of modernity's propensity toward exclusion, as he or she rules out in advance anything that does not conform to formalizable or quantifiable knowledge (1984, p. 80). Lyotard argues that the modern act of universalizing and homogenizing metaprescriptives violates what he considers the heterogeneity of language games. Furthermore, he claims that the act of consensus also stifles heterogeneity and imposes homogeneous criteria and a false universality.

By contrast, Lyotard champions dissensus over consensus, diversity and dissent over conformity and consensus, and heterogeneity and the incommensurable over homogeneity and universality. He writes: "Consensus does violence to the heterogeneity of language games. And invention is always born of dissension. Postmodern knowledge is not simply a tool of the authorities; it refines our sensitivity to differences and reinforces our ability to tolerate the incommensurable" (1984, p. 75).

Knowledge is produced, in Lyotard's view, by dissent, by putting into question existing paradigms, by inventing new ones, rather than assenting to universal truth or agreeing to a consensus. Although Lyotard's main focus is epistemological, he also implicitly presupposes a notion of the postmodern condition, writing: "Our working hypothesis is that the status of knowledge is altered as societies enter what is known as the postindustrial age and culture enters what is known as the postmodern age" (1984, p. 3). Like Baudrillard, Lyotard thus associates the postmodern with the trends of so-called "postindustrial society." Postmodern society is for Lyotard the society of computers, information, scientific knowledge, advanced technology, and rapid change due to new advances in science and technology. Indeed, he seems to agree with theorists of postindustrial society concerning the primacy of knowledge, information, and computerization – describing postmodern society as "the computerizationof society."

Yet the concept of "the postmodern condition," we would argue, points to some fundamental aporia in Lyotard and other French postmodern theories. His "war on totality" rejects totalizing theories, which he describes as master narratives that are somehow reductionist, simplistic, and even "terroristic," because they provide legitimations for totalitarian terror and suppress differences in unifying schemes. Yet Lyotard himself is advancing the notion of a "postmodern condition" which presupposes a dramatic break from modernity. Indeed, does not the very concept of postmodernity, or a postmodern condition, presuppose a master narrative, a totalizing perspective, which envisages the transition from a previous stage of society to a new one? Doesn't such theorizing presuppose *both* a concept of modernity and a notion of a radical break, or rupture, within history, which leads to a totally new condition that justifies the term *post*modern? Therefore, does not the very concept "postmodern" seem to presuppose both a master narrative and some notion of totality, and thus periodizing and totalizing thought – precisely the sort of epistemological operation and theoretical hubris that Lyotard and others want to renounce?

Against Lyotard, we might want to distinguish between master narratives, which attempt to subsume every particular, every specific viewpoint, and every key point into one totalizing theory (as in Hegel, some versions of Marxism, or Talcott Parsons), and grand narratives, which attempt to tell a "Big Story" such as the rise of capital, patriarchy, or colonialism. Within grand narratives, we might want to distinguish as well between metanarratives that tell a story about the foundation of knowledge and the narratives of social theory that attempt to conceptualize and interpret a complex diversity of phenomena and their interrelations, such as male domination or the exploitation of the working class. We might also distinguish between synchronic narratives that tell a story about a specific society at a given point in history, and diachronic narratives that analyze historical change, discontinuities, and ruptures. Lyotard tends to lump all large narratives together and thus does violence to the diversity of narratives in our culture.

In fact, Lyotard is caught in another double bind *vis-à-vis* normative positions from which he can criticize opposing positions. His renunciation of general principles and universal criteria preclude normative critical positions, yet he condemns grand narratives, totalizing thought, and other features of modern knowledge. This move catches him in another aporia, whereby he wants to reject general epistemological and normological positions while his critical interventions presuppose precisely such critical positions (such as the war on totality).

In our view, a more promising venture would be to make explicit, critically discuss, take apart, and perhaps reconstruct and rewrite the grand narratives of social theory rather than to just prohibit them and exclude them from the terrain of narrative. It is likely – as Fredric Jameson argues (1981) – that we are condemned to narrative in that individuals and cultures organize, interpret, and make sense of their experience through story-telling modes (see also Ricoeur, 1984). Not even a scientistic culture could completely dispense with narratives and the narratives of social theory will no doubt continue to operate in social analysis and critique in any case (Jameson, 1984, p. xii). If this is so, it would seem preferable to bring to light the narratives of modernity so as to critically examine and dissect them, rather than to simply prohibit certain sorts of narratives by Lyotardian Thought Police.

It appears that when one does not specify and explicate the specific sort of narratives of contemporary society involved in one's language games, there is a tendency to make use of the established narratives at one's disposal. For example, in the absence of an alternative theory of contemporary society, Lyotard uncritically accepts theories of "postindustrial society" and "postmodern culture" as accounts of the present age (1984, pp. 3, 7, 37, *passim*). Yet he presupposes the validity of these narratives without adequately defending them and without developing a social theory that would employ political economy and critical social theory to delineate the transformations suggested by the "post" in "postindustrial" or "postmodern." Rejecting grand narratives, we believe, simply covers over the theoretical problem of providing a narrative of the contemporary historical situation and points to the undertheorized nature of Lyotard's account of the postmodern condition. This would require at least some sort of large narrative of the transition to postmodernity – a rather big and exciting story one would think (see Best and Kellner, 2001).

In a sense, Lyotard's celebration of plurality replays the moves of liberal pluralism and empiricism. His "justice of multiplicities" is similar to traditional liberalism, which posits a plurality of political subjects with multiple interests and organizations. He replays tropes of liberal tolerance by valorizing diverse modes of multiplicity, refusing to privilege any subjects or positions, or refusing to offer a standpoint from which one can choose between opposing political positions. Thus he comes close to falling into a political relativism, which robs him of the possibility of making political discriminations and choosing between substantively different political positions, institutions, and social systems.

Lyotard's emphasis on a multiplicity of language games and deriving rules from specific and local regions is similar in some respects to an empiricism which rejects macrotheory and an analysis of hegemonic structures of domination and oppression. Limiting discourse to small narratives would prevent critical theory from making broader claims about structures of domination or legitimating critical claims made about society as a whole. His "wonderment at the variety of language games" and exhortation to multiply discourses, to produce more local narratives and languages, also replicates the current trend in academia to multiply specialized languages, to produce a diversity of new jargons. In fact, postmodern discourses themselves can be interpreted as an effect of a proliferating intellectual specialization, with its imperative to produce ever new discourses for the academic market. Against such theoretical specializations, we advocate the production of a common, vernacular language for theory, critique, and radical politics that eschews the jargon and obscurity that usually accompanies the production of specialized languages. This position is also advanced by Richard Rorty, although in a form that ultimately rejects theory.

Richard Rorty, the Attack on Theory, and Renunciation of Radical Politics

In theorizing the postmodern, one inevitably encounters the postmodern assault on theory, such as Lyotard's and Foucault's rejection of modern theory for its alleged totalizing and essentializing character. The argument is ironic, of course, since it falsely homogenizes a heterogeneous "modern tradition" and since postmodern theorists such as Foucault, Lyotard, and Baudrillard are often as totalizing as any modern thinker (Kellner, 1989; Best, 1995). But where Lyotard seeks justification of theory within localized language games, arguing that no universal criteria are possible to ground objective truths or universal values, Foucault steadfastly resists any efforts, local or otherwise, to validate normative concepts and theoretical perspectives. For Foucault, justification ensnares one in metaphysical illusions such as "truth," and the only concern of the philosopher–critic is to dismantle old ways of thinking, to attack existing traditions and institutions, and to open up new horizons of experience for greater individual freedom. What matters, then, is results, and if actions bring greater freedom, the theoretical perspectives informing them are "justified." From this perspective, theoretical discourse is seen not so much as "correct" or "true," but as "efficacious," as producing positive effects.

Continuing along this path, postmodernists have attacked theory *per se* as at best irrelevant to practice and at worst a barrier to it. Rorty assails both metatheory – reflection on the status of theory itself, which often is concerned with epistemological and normative justifications of claims and values – and theory, which he critiques in three related ways that emerge through his own articulation of the "end of philosophy" thesis. Rigorously trained in analytic philosophy, Rorty became a turncoat and abandoned the professional dogma that philosophy was "queen of the sciences" or the universal arbiter of values whose task was to provide foundations for truth and value claims. Philosophy has no special knowledge or truth claims because it, like any other cultural phenomenon, is a thoroughly linguistic phenomenon. For Rorty, language is a poetic construction that creates worlds, not a mirror that reflects "reality," and there are no presuppositionless or neutral truths that evade the contingencies of historically shaped selfhood. Consequently, there is no non-circular Archimedean point for grounding theory. Language can only provide us with a "description" of the world that is thoroughly historical and contingent in nature.

Thus, the first move in Rorty's assault on theory is an attack on the idea that theory can provide objective foundations for knowledge and ethics. Alleged universal truths are merely local, time-bound perspectives and masks for a "Real" that cannot be known. The second critique immediately follows: if there are no universal or objective truths, no neutral language to arbitrate competing claims, then "theory" has no power to adjudicate among competing languages or descriptions, a task that inevitably transforms theory into metatheory once the conditions of argumentation themselves become sufficiently problematic.

Hence, Rorty denies that the theorist can definitively criticize, argue, evaluate, or even "deconstruct," since there is no fulcrum from which to push one claim as "right," "correct," or "better" than another. The theorist is replaced by the ironist, one who is aware of the ineliminable contingency of selfhood and discourse. Accepting the new limitations, the ironist can only "redescribe" the older theories in new languages and offer new descriptions for themselves and others. We adopt values and ideologies on emotive rather than rational grounds. Every vocabulary is incommensurable with another, and there is no "final vocabulary" with which one can arbitrate normative and epistemological claims. Thus, for Rorty:

> The method is to redescribe lots and lots of things in new ways, until you have created a pattern of linguistic behavior which will tempt the rising generation to adopt it . . . This sort of philosophy does not work piece by piece, analyzing concept after concept, or testing thesis after thesis. Rather it works holistically and pragmatically. It says things like "try thinking of it this way" – or more specifically, "try to ignore the apparently futile traditional questions by substituting the following new and possibly interesting questions." It does not pretend to have a better candidate for doing the same old things which we did when we spoke in the old way . . . Conforming to my own precepts, I am not going to offer arguments against the vocabulary I want to replace. Instead, I am going to try to make the vocabulary I favor look more attractive by showing how it may be used to describe a variety of topics. (1989, p. 9)

One would think that this replacement of epistemological criteria of "truth" with aesthetic values of "attractiveness" would commit Rorty to relativism, but he denies the term on the grounds that it belongs to a discredited foundationalist framework, as the term "blasphemy" makes no sense within an atheistic logic. Whether or not we can say that Rorty is a relativist in the sense of someone who cannot demonstrate that one viewpoint is more true than another, he is not a "relativist" in the sense of someone who thinks that all claims are equally good or viable. Clearly, Rorty is pushing for some descriptions – those that celebrate contingency, irony, solidarity, and liberal values – over others, but he claims that one cannot "argue" for the new descriptions. On this level, the attack on theory means simply that it is useless to provide arguments for one's positions; the only thing one can do is to offer new descriptions and hope others will find them appealing and more useful for (liberal) society. Dethroning philosophy, Rorty claims that literature is a far more powerful tool for interpreting the world and offering the descriptions needed for self-creation and social progress. Fiction takes the place of theory. Of course, Rorty cannot help but argue for his positions, and is himself still writing philosophy, not fiction.

From this step follows the third argument in Rorty's attack on theory. The "theorist" should abandon all attempts to radically criticize social institutions. First, as we have seen, "critique" has no force for Rorty and, ultimately, one description is as good as any other. But "theory" on this level also means for Rorty the attempt, classically inscribed in Plato's *Republic*, to merge public and private concerns, to unite the private quest for perfection with social justice. Here, Rorty is guided by the assumption that tradition and convention are far more powerful forces than reason in the social construction of life, in holding the "social glue" together.

Rorty holds that philosophical views on topics such as the nature of the self or the meaning of the good life are as irrelevant to politics as are arguments about the existence of God. He wants to revive liberal values without feeling the need to defend them on a philosophical level: "What is needed is a sort of intellectual analogue of civic virtue – tolerance, irony, and a willingness to let spheres of culture flourish without worrying too much about their 'common ground,' their unification, the 'intrinsic ideals' they suggest, or what picture of man they 'presuppose' " (1989, p. 168). Since philosophy can provide no shared or viable foundation for a political concept of justice, it should be abandoned, and replaced with historical narratives and poetic descriptions. Ultimately, Rorty's goal is to redescribe modern culture and the vocabulary of Enlightenment rationalism in strongly historicist and pragmatist terms.

In this vein, Rorty's recent *Achieving Our Country* (1998) provides a provocative critique of the academic/cultural studies of the Left in the United States. Seeking liberal politics without (metaphysical) liberal theory and a pragmatic oriented politics rooted in a strong vision of social reform without the need for theoretical justification, Rorty asks the Left to get over its obsession with theory and cultural politics. He demands that the Left "kick its philosophy habit," and return to the kind of politics practiced by an earlier Left, the one of the Great Depression period, which was concretely wedded to social reform. Until such concrete progressive reforms are attained, Rorty maintains, "our country remains unachieved" (1998).

Taking a giant leap to the right of Foucault, Rorty claims not only that philosophy provides no foundation for politics, but that it plays no political role whatsoever. Despite his assault on foundationalism, Foucault was a tireless militant and "engaged intellectual" who used theory as a weapon for political struggle. For Rorty, however, philosophy has no public or political role. Reviving the classic liberal distinction between the public and private, Rorty claims that philosophy should be reserved for private life, where it can be ironic at best, while leaving political and moral traditions to govern public life. Even Derrida, master of subversion and irony, insisted that deconstruction entails political commitments, and at least made public and political gestures, however vague or dilatory.

We agree with Rorty's initial premise that consciousness, language, and subjectivity are historical and contingent in nature, that our relation to the world is mediated many times over, but we reject most of his conclusions. First, although we too are against foundationalism, we hold that it is possible for theory to construct nonarbitrary grounds to assess competing factual and value claims. These grounds are not metaphysical or ahistorical: they are found in the criteria of logic and argumentation which are reasonable to hold, and in shared social values that are the assumptions of a liberal democracy which Rorty himself affirms. Rejecting the implication of Rorty's position, we do not find it arbitrary to say that racism is wrong, or that critiques of racism or sexism are merely good "descriptions" with which we hope others would agree. Rather, we find the arguments for racism far weaker than the arguments against racism, and counter to liberal values that enlightened citizens hold – or should hold. The assumptions of these anti-racist arguments are of course themselves historical; they stem from the modern liberal tradition that proclaims the right of all human beings to a life of freedom and dignity. Rorty would rightly see this as a "tradition," but it is one that was constituted with a strong rational component and has compelling force for those who wish – and clearly not all do – to play the "language game" of democratic argumentation.

Similarly, while we do not know what the nature of the universe ultimately is, we find that astronomy provides a better "description" than astrology, that evolutionary theory is more compelling than creationism. Our court of appeal is reason, facts, verified bodies of knowledge, and our experience of the world itself, which is not infinitely malleable to any and all descriptions, such as the one that says the earth is flat. Symptomatic of this problem, Rorty adopts a problematic consensus theory of truth that holds that "truth" emerges from free discussion; it is "whatever wins in a free and open encounter" (1989, p. 67). This ignores the fact that even the "freest" inquiry can still produce falsehood and that might often continues to make right. Needless to say, the defense of such claims will require the tools of theory – science or philosophy – rather than fiction. Abandoning these tools, the ironist is disburdened of the need to defend his claims and tries to evade argumentative responsibilities in ways we don't tolerate in our undergraduate students. For Rorty, "interesting philosophy is rarely an examination of the pros and cons of a thesis" (1989, p. 9). Admittedly, argumentation is difficult and not always sexy, especially to the mind of an impatient aestheticist who seeks beauty, novelty, and speed over rigor, fairness, and coherence. Rorty is only one step away from Baudrillard, the selfproclaimed "intellectual terrorist" who prefers simply to blow up ideas with unsubstantiated

claims and outrageous exaggerations rather than attending to matters of evaluating truth or falsehood, or patient empirical demonstration of his claims (see Kellner, 1989).

Moreover, without some kind of metatheory, Rorty cannot plausibly claim that liberalism is good or convincingly show which practices are to be favored over others. If politics is strictly an aesthetic affair, what standards do we use to judge success from failure, good from bad politics? With Lyotard, Rorty seeks to proliferate ever new descriptions of the self and the world. This has the value of overcoming stale assumptions and entrenched dogmas, but it represents a fetishism of novelty over concern for truth and justice. On this scheme, there can be no gradual progress toward greater insight and knowledge; there is only succeeding and random points of discontinuity that scatter inquiry and knowledge in fragmented directions. Put in Rorty's own terms, our claim is that foundationalism, rationalism, and progressivist narratives of Western theory can be "redescribed" in better ways that make them more effective tools for historical analysis and social critique.

From our denial that theory is powerless to seek grounds of justification for claims, or to effectively challenge, counter, refute, or argue for specific positions, we hold that a crucial role of theory is to step beyond the circumscribed boundaries of individuality to assess the ways in which the social world shapes subjectivity. For Rorty, by contrast, the personal is no longer political. The question, of course, is not whether or not one should be theoretical, since all critical, philosophical, or political orientations are theoretical, at least in their embedded assumptions, which guide thought and action. No one hoping to speak intelligibly about the world can hope to avoid theory; one can either simply assume the validity of one's theory, or become reflexive about the sources of one's theoretical position – their compatibility, their validity, and their effects. The potential weakness and triviality of a non-theoretical approach is evident, for example, in the anti-theoretical biases of many cultural studies that mindlessly celebrate media culture as interesting, fun, or meaningful, while ignoring its economic, sociopolitical, and ideological functions.

For Theory and Politics

Theory is necessary to the extent that the world is not completely and immediately transparent to consciousness. This is never the case, especially in our own hypercapitalist culture where the shadows flickering on the walls of our caves stem principally from television sets, the corporate-dominated ideology machines that speak the language of deception and manipulation. As we show in our book *The Postmodern Adventure* (Best and Kellner, 2001), which contains studies of Thomas Pynchon, Michael Herr, Mary Shelley, H. G. Wells, Philip K. Dick, and other imaginative writers, Rorty is right that fiction can powerfully illuminate the conditions of our lives, often in more concrete and illuminating ways than theory. Ultimately, we need to grant power to both theory and fiction, and understand their different perspectives and roles. For just as novels such as Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* had a dramatic social impact, so too has the discourse of the Enlightenment, which provided the philosophical inspiration for the American and French Revolutions, as well as numerous succeeding revolts in history.

Postmodern attacks on theory are part and parcel of contemporary misology – the hatred of reason – that also manifests itself in the mysticism pervading some versions of deep ecology and ecofeminism, in anti-humanist attacks from "biocentric" viewpoints that often see human beings as nothing more than a scourge on nature, in the layperson's rejection of philosophy for common sense, in the pragmatist celebration of the technological and practical, in the postmodern embrace of desire and spontaneity over reflection, and in the mindless "spiritualism" pervading our culture (see Boggs, 2000, pp. 166ff.). The positive value of pragmatic critiques of theory is to remind one to maintain a close relationship between theory and practice, to avoid excessively abstract analyses and becoming mired in a metatheory that becomes obsessed with the justification of theory over its application – a problem that frequently plagues Habermas's work (see Best, 1995). The pragmatic critique helps keep theory from becoming an esoteric, specialized discourse, manipulated and understood only by a cadre of academic experts. No doubt we are not alone in our dissatisfaction with the highly esoteric discourse that comes not only from modernists such as Habermas, but also – and more so – from poststructuralist and postmodern champions of the ineffable and unreadable, or the terminally obscure and pompous.

Operating in the tradition of critical theory, we believe that the role of theory is to provide weapons for social critique and change, to illuminate the sources of human unhappiness and to contribute to the goal of human emancipation. Against Rorty's very un-postmodern dichotomization of the public and private (a centerpiece of bourgeois ideology), we believe that the citizens of the "private realm" (itself a social and historical creation) have strong obligations to participate actively in the public realm through rational criticism and debate. With Rorty, we do not believe that the theorist must seek to construct a perfect bridge between the public and the private, for the range of action and choice on the part of the individual always exceeds the minimal requirements of order in a free society. Rather, the role of the theorist is to help analyze what the conditions of freedom and human well-being might be, to ask whether or not they are being fulfilled, and to expose the forces of domination and oppression.

We see public intellectuals as specialists in critical thinking who can employ their skills to counter the abuses of the public realm in order to help reconstitute society and the polity more democratically. This involves helping to ensure that the private realm and its liberties and pleasures are not effaced through the ever-growing penetration of mass media, state administration, electronic surveillance, the capitalist marketplace, and globalization. Indeed, new media and computer technologies have created novel public spheres and thus unique opportunities for public intellectuals to exercise their skills of critique and argumentation (Kellner, 1997).

In addition, we believe that theory can provide *social maps* and *historical narratives* that supply spatial and temporal contextualizations of the present age. Social maps study society holistically, moving from any point or mode of human experience into an ever-expanding macroscopic picture that may extend from the individual self to its network of everyday social relations, to its more encompassing regional environment, to its national setting, and finally to the international arena of global capitalism. Within this holistic framework, social maps shift from one level to another,

articulating complex connections between economics, politics, the state, media culture, everyday life, and various ideologies and practices.

Historical narratives, similarly, contextualize the present by identifying both how the past has constituted the present and how the present opens up to alternative futures. As argued in the historicist tradition that began in the nineteenth century – in the work of Hegel, Dilthey, Marx, Weber, and others – all values, worldviews, traditions, social institutions, and individuals themselves must be understood historically as they change and evolve through time. As in the form of Foucault's genealogies or various popular histories, historical narratives chart the temporal trajectories of significant experiences and events, political movements, or the forces constituting subjectivities. Against the postmodern tendency to randomize history as a disconnected series of events, we believe that historical narratives should grasp both historical continuities and discontinuities, while analyzing how continuities embody developmental dynamics, such as moral and technical evolution, that have emancipatory possibilities and should be further developed in the future (Best and Kellner, 1991, 1997, 2001).

Together, social maps and historical narratives study the points of intersection between individuals and their cultures, between power and knowledge. To the fullest degree possible, they seek to lift the veils of ideology and expose the given as contingent and the present as historically constituted, while providing visions of alternative futures. Maps and narratives, then, are meant to overcome quietism and fatalism, to sharpen political vision, and to encourage translation of theory into practice in order to advance both personal freedom and social justice. Social maps and historical narratives should not be confused with the territories and times they analyze; they are approximations of a densely constituted human world that require theory and imagination. Nor should they ever be seen as final or complete, since they must be constantly rethought and revised in light of new information and changing situations. Finally, as we are suggesting, these maps can deploy the resources of either "theory" or "fiction," since both provide illuminations of social experience from different vantage points, each of which are useful and illuminating, and necessarily supplement each other.

The social maps called classical social theories are to some extent torn and tattered, in fragments, and in some cases outdated and obsolete. But we need to construct new ones from the sketches and fragments of the past to make sense of our current historical condition, dominated by media culture, information explosion, new technologies, and a global restructuring of capitalism. Maps and theories provide orientation, overviews, and show how parts relate to each other and to a larger whole. If something new appears on the horizon, a good map will chart it, including sketches of some future configurations. And while some old maps and authorities are discredited and obsolete, some traditional theories continue to provide guideposts for current thought and action, as we have attempted to demonstrate in our various books that marshal both modern and postmodern theories to map and narrativize our present moment (see Best and Kellner, 1997, 2001).

Yet we also need new sketches of society and culture, and part of the postmodern adventure is sailing forth into new domains without complete maps, or with

maps that are fragmentary and torn. Journeys into the postmodern thus thrust us into novel worlds, making us explorers of uncharted, or poorly charted, domains. Our mappings can thus only be provisional reports back from our explorations that require further investigation, testing, and revision. Yet the brave new worlds of postmodern culture and society are of sufficient interest, importance, and novelty to justify taking chances, leaving the familiar behind, and trying out new ideas and approaches.

Critical theories require a standpoint for critique and thus normative dimensions. As we have argued elsewhere (Best and Kellner, 1991, 1997), normative concepts and values such as democracy, freedom, social justice, human rights, and other value heritages of modern society were themselves validated in theoretical discussions and political struggles and provide important standpoints of critique. Normative critique, therefore, does not necessarily involve foundational or universalist positions, nor is it merely subjective and arbitrary. Rather, cultures and societies over long periods of history have come to agree that certain values, institutions, and forms of social life are valuable enough to struggle and die for, and one of the tasks of critical theory is to explicate and defend which normative positions continue to be relevant and vital in the contemporary era.

Finally, we need new politics to deal with the problems of capitalist globalization, environmental crises, species extinction, terrorism, and the failure of conventional politics to provide social justice and well-being for all. We fear that just as Rorty's and other postmodernists' assaults on theory block attempts to map and critique the new social constellations of the present moment, so too do attacks on radical politics and defense of a reformist liberalism and pragmatism vitiate attempts to deal with the new global forces of technocapitalism. Demonstrations against the World Trade Organization meetings in Seattle in December 1999 and the subsequent antiglobalization movement (see Best and Kellner, 2001) suggest that the radical spirit is still very much alive. Indeed, we believe that it is new social movements and the forces of radical opposition that provide the most promising avenues of radical democratic social transformation in the present moment.[6]

Thus, while postmodern approaches offer much to the reconstruction of critical theory and democratic politics for the present age, theories that fail to engage the proliferating and intensifying problems of capitalist globalization, that do not articulate the continuities between the old and the new, and that renounce the normative resources of criticism are severely limiting. To provide justification (of a non-metaphysical kind), or a defense of critical theories and alternative visions of what history, social life, and our relation to the natural world could be, continues to be necessary to the project of understanding and changing the world. We are in a troubling and exciting twilight period, in the crossroads between modernity and postmodernity, and the task ahead is to forge reconstructed maps and politics adequate to the great challenges that we face.

Notes

1 For our own perspectives on the modern and the postmodern, see Best and Kellner (1991, 1997, 2001).
2 In his book *The Present Age*, a commentary on a popular novel with that title, Kierkegaard (1978) distinguishes between antiquity and modern society, and the previous Age of Revolution and the present age (i.e., the 1840s), by noting a precipitous decline in passion; see our detailed analysis of this text in Best and Kellner (1990, 1997).

3 On Nietzsche's critique of modernity, see Kellner (1991); on the neglect of Nietzsche in classical social theory, see Antonio (1995); and on Nietzsche and the postmodern, see Best and Kellner (1997).
4 For further discussions of our positions on Foucault, Lyotard, and postmodern theory, see Best and Kellner (1991, 1997).
5 In fact, there is evidence that Foucault holds a similar position, that his intention is not to renounce normative discourse in general, but only the normative pronouncements of *intellectuals*, or, more restrictively, of Foucault himself, in order to allow for individual and public choice and debate. Thus, while Foucault refuses to say whether or not democracy is "better than" totalitarianism, he does not prohibit this distinction from being made by others: "I do not wish, as an intellectual, to play the moralist or prophet. I don't want to say that the Western countries are better than the ones of the Eastern bloc, etc. The masses have come of age, politically and morally. They are the ones who've got to choose individually and collectively" (1991, p. 172). For further discussion of the normative problems in critical theory, and an extended comparison of Foucault and Habermas, see Best (1995).
6 See Best and Kellner (1997, 2001).

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