

BLURRED LINES

A CRITIQUE OF TRANS-
EVERYTHING-ISM

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A Critique of
Trans-Everything-IsM

Hiram R. Diaz III

Essence, Accident, Power

Contrary to what most books on the subject will tell you, postmodern philosophers were universally in agreement regarding three important philosophical beliefs in their writings. The first belief they universally shared was antiessentialism. Anti-essentialism makes the ontological claim that no identities have essential properties, but are accidental constructs of a variety of contingent material forces. “An essential property of an object is a property that it must have while anaccidental property of an object is one that it happens to have but that it could lack.”¹ According to antiessentialism, everything is a construct.

The second belief, following the first, is that because everything is a construct, everything may be deconstructed into its constituent parts. Typically, under the overriding assumption of evolutionism, postmodern philosophers engaged in a genealogical analysis of their chosen subjects, intending “to show that a given [subject]...was the result of contingent turns of history, not the outcome of rationally inevitable trends.”²

The third belief, following from the first and second is that all ontological and epistemological relationships are reducible to power (read: politics). If everything is a

¹ <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/essential-accidental>.

² <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/foucault/#4.3>.

construct, then nothing is necessary. If nothing is necessary, then no attempt at controlling a particular subject [say, the human body] via definition, empirical study, or the axioms of Scripture is legitimate. And if this is so, then universal rebellion (against beliefs, philosophical systems, religious systems, scientific discourse in all of its variations) is legitimate. Not only is it legitimate – it is inevitable. As one would expect, this encouraged dissent from socio-political structures of every stripe. Likewise, as one would also expect, it encouraged advocacy for marginalized members of society (e.g. non-white/non-european ethnic minorities).

Insofar as the postmodern turn helped deconstruct slanderous stereotypes and curb sinful behavior against fellow bearers of the image of God, it was not all bad. Nevertheless, because there were no essences, no absolute moral standards to judge whether political oppression or political liberation is good or bad, no absolute standard by which we could judge one philosophical system as true over and against the others which are false – the benefits of such deconstructive analyses were short lived. In postmodernism, there are no essential subjects (e.g. universal Man) but only historically contingent subjectivities (i.e. subjects that are composed of accidental properties which can change at a whim). Consequently, under postmodernism there would be no essential difference between Naziism, on the one hand, and the Civil Rights movement, on the other hand – both movements would simply be attempting to obtain and exercise power.

Right and wrong, accordingly, could not be understood universally.

Metaphysical Monism: The Metaphysics of Postmodernism

Yet if everything is a construct, i.e. reducible to parts, then everything shares the property of being constructible, i.e. being put together or taken apart over the course of time. If this is the case, then what we are facing is, in fact, not at all a form of anti-essentialism but a deeply rooted belief in the essentiality of matter. The philosophical position that marks postmodernism, therefore, is a thoroughgoing materialism. I have written on this topic elsewhere,³ so I won't delve too deeply into the matter here. What must be noted, however, is that the metaphysics espoused by postmodernist philosophers was not given much emphasis by many. It was perhaps Gilles Deleuze, a French postmodern metaphysician, who alone was bold enough to openly preach the metaphysics of postmodernism, declaring that pluralism is monism.⁴

³ See *The Fundamental Axiom of Postmodernism*
https://www.academia.edu/5547058/The_Fundamental_Axiom_of_Postmodernism.

⁴ For a more detailed discussion on this subject see Deleuze, Gilles. "Dualism, Monism and Multiplicities (Desire-Pleasure-Jouissance)," in *Contretemps* 2 (May, 2001), 92-108.

The belief that materiality is one, although materiality's manifestations (i.e. every construction conceivable) are infinitely varied/varying, is not surprising seeing as German Romanticism and Darwinian Evolutionism, for which German Romanticism, aesthetically developing monistic trends in philosophy,⁵ apparently paved the way,⁶ formed the materialistic-monistic ground from which postmodernism eventually grew. Ironically, however, the postmodernist attempt to identify the radical multiplicity of kinds of philosophies, "valid" expressions of religious beliefs, gender, and sexual orientations as essentially identical has returned full-circle, affirming the kind of oppressive reductionism that postmodernists wanted to, in principle, eliminate from academic and popular thinking.

⁵ Greg Bahnsen gives a quite thoroughgoing history of the development of materialistic monism's popularity in his article "On Worshiping the Creature Rather than the Creator," in *Journal of Christian Reconstruction* —800/553-3938. I:1 (Summer, 1974).

⁶ See Diaz, Hiram. *The Romantic System of Thought: Unearthing William Blake's Axioms*,

https://www.academia.edu/5547421/The_Romantic_System_of_Thought_Unearthing_William_Blakes_Axioms; Richards, Robert J. "Darwin on Mind, Morals, and Emotions," in *The Cambridge Companion to Darwin*, eds. J. Hodge and G. Radick. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 92-115; *Darwinian Heresies*, eds. Abigail Lustig, Robert J. Richards, Michael Ruse.

The Body, Gender, and “Race”

Because there were no absolutes for the postmodernist philosophers, everything was up for grabs. This included the body. The body was, in its essentially material status, without definition, amorphous. To be sure, there were biological distinctions to be made, but these distinctions, like every other distinction, were also not absolute. Defining a male or a female was equivalent to exerting institutional/ideological power over them illegitimately. As mentioned above, the individual could, therefore, legitimately protest any definition of himself that he did not desire. As philosopher Douglas Groothuis notes in his article *The Philosophy of Gender*:

The philosophy that undergirds and animates this redefinition of gender is anti-essentialist and constructivist. Humans as male and female have no objective nature, qua gender. Gender is only a placeholder for the will of the identifier, who chooses gender not on the basis of anything stable or trustworthy, but only through erotic eccentricity. One constructs a gender identity, but without the aid of a blueprint. What one constructs, one can deconstruct—whimsy without end.⁷

⁷ <http://douglasgroothuis.com/2015/07/02/the-philosophy-of-gender>.

Hence, transgenderism is being promoted in popular culture as one of the newest vistas of human freedom regarding the human body and gender.

Yet the body as racially/ethnically or, more broadly, sociologically determined was an idea that was also promulgated by postmodernist philosophers. After all, if the subject is a contingent, historically constructed phenomenon⁸ his epistemology and ethics must likewise be determined. Ethnically diverse groups will have respectively diverse epistemologies and moralities. This is why identifying “Reason” as a “white male construct” is something that postmodernists have done for decades, although it is only now coming into the view of non-academics.⁹ The body is malleable, fluid, amorphous in its essentially material state, but the changes it may undergo exist within a set of equally malleable constraints. Postmodernist philosophers criticized traditional notions of the subject, rationality, will, intellect, gender, etc with various anti-essentialist philosophical tools.

⁸ I mean this in the Kantian sense of the word phenomenon.

⁹ See Neff, Blake. “Professor: Reason Itself is a White Male Construct,” The Daily Caller,

<http://dailycaller.com/2015/07/03/professor-reason-itself-is-a-white-male-construct/>; Yancey, George and John D. Caputo, “Looking ‘White’ In The Face,” The New York Times,

http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2015/07/02/looking-white-in-the-face/?_r=0.

Among the more popular tools of the postmodernist philosopher were Marxism and Freudianism. While these schools of thought were originally foundationalist models of, respectively, universally recognizable socio-economic and individual-psychological realities, in the hands of postmodern relativists, they became subordinate to the philosopher wielding them. Marxism's conception of the mind as the byproduct of socio-economic preconditions was found to be a useful tool against rationalism's claim to innate knowledge of universal truths, as well as empiricism's claim to a universal world of sensorial preconditions requisite to the formation of the mind. Similarly, Freudianism's conception of real self-hood as residing beneath the appearances of "everyday" slips of the tongue, figures of speech, dreams, choices of metaphor, etc and not in the explicit propositional representations of one's innermost thoughts, was found to be useful in attacking claims of communicative transparency and fidelity to universal ethical standards in the socius, in the family, in interpersonal exchanges, etc.

Philosophers have, by and large, moved past these criticisms of reason, ethics, and psychology,¹⁰ but the spectres of postmodern conceptions of sociological (read: racial, gender, economic, political, ad nauseum) identity have been perpetuated by popular culture's representation of "race" and "class" as determinative of individual identity,

¹⁰ See Kirby, Alan. "The Death of Postmodernism And Beyond," in *Philosophy Now* 58 (November/December, 2006), 34–37.

ethical commitments, and intellectual ability. Likewise, many outspoken individuals operate on the assumption that what a society and its inhabitants really believe about themselves and one another resides below the surface, behind the quotidian activities that are only apparently universal (e.g. child rearing, love, personal conflict, aspirations to succeed in one's profession, and so on).

Sadly, those who are not familiar with the underlying philosophical assumptions at work in the concepts of "white privilege" and "internalized racism" tend to believe that these concepts have been founded upon some substantial scientific basis. The fact of the matter is that these ideas are derived from the assumptions of (i.)materialistic monism, (ii.)a Freudian subject whose outward expressions are meant to conceal and inward conflict betweenraw animalistic desire for sex or food or pure power over other animals and persons, and (iii.)economic epistemological, ethical, and intersubjective determinism (i.e. Marxism).

[As an aside: There are certainly instances of "racism" (i.e. sinful abuse of fellow bearers of God's iimage, based upon nothing more than color or language or social custom), but these are recognizable as such because they are instantiations of what God's law forbids. Assuming to know that the real person is what lies beneath the mirage/appearance of words he expresses in discourse with you is not only an assumption based in bad philosophy and

logical fallacies, but ultimately reduces to skepticism. More importantly than this, however, is the fact that God commands his people to love one another, and this involves not assuming the worst of another individual, although always remaining open to it in principle.

The concepts of “white privilege” and “internalized racism” do not give fellow bearers of God’s image the benefit of a doubt when analyzing their representation of themselves. Paul explains that love is patient, kind, bears all things, believes all things, and hopes all things. The concepts of “white privilege” and “internalized racism” are not, therefore, examples of loving behavior toward one’s neighbor.]

The Incoherence of Materialistic Monism

If the only substance is matter, then it follows from this that minds are merely modifications, in some way, of matter. As the monist philosopher Galen Strawson notes, “every concrete phenomenon in the universe is physical, according to materialists. So all mental phenomena, including experiential phenomena, are physical phenomena...”.¹¹ Not all materialist philosophers have followed their philosophical commitment to its logical conclusions, as Strawson also notes.¹² The contemporary

¹¹ *Real Materialism and Other Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 21.

¹² Strawson (54):

It follows that real physicalism can have nothing to do with physicalism, the view — the faith — that the nature or essence of all concrete reality can in principle be fully captured in the terms of physics. Real physicalism cannot have anything to do with physicalism unless it is supposed — obviously falsely — that the terms of physics can fully capture the nature or essence of experience. [...] Real physicalism, then, must accept that experiential phenomena are physical phenomena. But how can experiential phenomena be physical phenomena? Many take this claim to be profoundly problematic (this is the ‘mind – body problem’).

[...]

A very large mistake. It is perhaps Descartes’s, or perhaps rather ‘Descartes’s’, greatest mistake, and it is funny that in the

embracing of materialistic monism, due to its presence and influence in the slowly decaying corpus of postmodern popular culture, nevertheless, is undeniable. Whereas the postmodern emphasis on difference and variety has been largely lost, the underlying metaphysical belief is still the same: From Deleuze's equation of the plural with the monad, and vice versa, through reassessments of Friedrich Nietzsche's ontological and value monism,¹³ contemporary culture is given to the belief that matter is the only individual thing there is.¹⁴ But is it any more tenable than the postmodernism it gave foundational support to? No.

The logical impossibility of materialism is something I've covered in other articles,¹⁵ as is the logical impossibility of

past fifty years it has been the most fervent revilers of the great Descartes, the true father of modern materialism, who have made the mistake with most intensity. Some of them... are so in thrall to the fundamental intuition of dualism, the intuition that the experiential and the physical are utterly and irreconcilably different, that they are prepared to deny the existence of experience, more or less (c)overly, because they are committed to 'physicalism', that is, physicalism.

¹³ See *Nietzsche on Mind & Nature*, eds. Dries, Manuel & P.J.E. Kail. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

¹⁴ See *Founders of Constructive Postmodern Philosophy: Peirce, James, Bergson, Whitehead, and Hartshorne*. David Ray Griffin, John B. Cobb Jr., et al. (New York: SUNY Press, 1993); Deleuze, Gilles. *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994); Badiou, Alan. *Being and Event*, trans. Oliver Feltham (New York: Continuum, 2007).

¹⁵ See "Knitty, Gritty, Knotty Problems for Materialism," <https://involutedgeologies.wordpress.com/2013/10/04/nitty-gritty-knotty-problems-for-materialism>.

monism.¹⁶ Philosopher Peter van Inwagen, however, very succinctly addresses the main problem I have (somewhat clumsily) pointed out elsewhere. van Inwagen:

The word ‘monism’ comes from a Greek word that means ‘alone’ or ‘single’. As we have said, Monism is the thesis that there is only one individual thing. But this statement of Monism raises an interesting question. If there is only one individual thing, what is meant by calling it an individual thing? We have seen that an individual thing is a thing that is in some not-too-well-defined sense a separate thing. But if there is only one individual thing, what is it “separate” from? It can’t be its own parts it is separate from, for, if it had parts, those parts would themselves be individual things: an individual thing with parts would “automatically” not be the only individual thing. (For example, if the World consisted of a single chair, there would be many individual things. There would be the legs of the chair, the back of the chair, various carbon and oxygen atoms that were parts of the chair, and so on.)

¹⁶ See “Appearance Vs. Reality: The Dualistic Foundations of Monism,” <https://involvedgenealogies.wordpress.com/2013/07/23/appearance-vs-reality-the-dualistic-foundations-of-monism/>; “A Very Brief Argument Against Pantheism,” <https://involvedgenealogies.wordpress.com/2011/02/28/a-very-brief-argument-against-pantheism/>.

[...]

Let us therefore understand Monism as the thesis that there is a single individual thing and that, moreover, this thing could not possibly have coexisted with any other individual thing. And let us say that it is a part of the thesis of Monism that that is the way the World has to be: the World must consist of a single individual thing that could not possibly coexist with any other individual thing. When Monism is so stated, it is indeed difficult to see what the Monist could mean by saying that there is only one individual thing, for it is difficult to see in what sense the word ‘separate’ could be applied to a thing that not only does not but could not coexist with other individual things, and it is therefore difficult to see what is meant by applying the word ‘individual’ to the thing that is supposed to be the one individual thing.¹⁷

Materialistic monism is counterintuitive and logically incoherent.

Yet the contemporary emphasis on trans-everything-ism reveals that fallen man is ultimately not concerned with truth but with finding justification for continuing in

¹⁷ *Metaphysics* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2009), 34-35. For a more thoroughgoing critique of the position, as articulated by Spinoza and F. H. Bradley, see pp. 38-46 of the same work.

unbelief, licentiousness, and self-righteousness. Pragmatism has come to replace the revelation, commands, and promises of God.¹⁸ Consequently, salvation is no longer the act of God for us; rather, salvation is by us for us. How is that salvation achieved? By changing one's standards, one's ethical commitments, one's "truths" in order to better suit one's needs. The pangs of conscience are suppressed by this continual shifting of epistemological and ethical commitments and standards, but this is precisely where Christians can reintroduce the reality of sin, judgment, and the Gospel.

Try as he may, fallen man cannot wholly (i.e. consistently) embrace a worldview where no concept is irrational. Rather than properly assessing non-Christian worldview as irrational, however, he identifies the biblical worldview as irrational. Paul the apostle, speaking tongue in cheek, calls the Gospel "the foolishness of God,"¹⁹ setting it in contrast with "the wisdom of the world,"²⁰ and consequently revealing that the pragmatism resulting in a variety of moral and epistemological standards is reducible to a unified assault on the biblical worldview. Gordon H. Clark, commenting on 1st Corinthians 1, explains:

¹⁸ This is unsurprising given that pragmatism originated with Charles Sanders Peirce, himself a materialistic monist. See Ochs, Peter. "Charles Sanders Peirce," in *Founders of Constructive PostmodernPhilosophy: Peirce, James, Bergson, Whitehead, and Hartsborne*, 43-87.

¹⁹ 1st Cor 1:25.

²⁰ 1st Cor 1:20-21 & 3:19.

Secular science never brought anyone to God. God regards it as foolishness and will destroy it. Divine wisdom centers in the doctrine of the Atonement.

[...]

Since these people [i.e. the so-called “wise men of this age”] are dead in sin, they regard the Gospel as nonsense.

[...]

Note that God foreordained pagan philosophy...for the purpose of blinding their eyes and hardening their hearts. The course of secular culture was no haphazard development. It was by the wisdom of God in controlling history that...the Greek philosophers [and, by extension, their successors/devotees] could not know God.²¹

Hence, the pragmatism/irrationalism of our time is foolishness to God; and God’s Wisdom is foolishness to fallen man in all eras. And this is where we may continually hammer home, as it were, the fact that even antiessentialism and antifoundationalism are either wisdom or foolishness, or the Gospel is Wisdom or foolishness. There is no escape from this antithesis.

²¹ *First Corinthians: A Contemporary Commentary* (Maryland: The Trinity Foundation, 1975), 21ff.

The world's desire is to throw the sands of multiple worldviews into the eyes of its Christian opponents. Let us, then, guard ourselves against the claims of pragmatism/irrationalism/relativism by reinforcing the antithesis. Either man or God is wise or a fool, even the foolish can see that.