Chapter One:

The Contradiction within Postmodernists' Reality

This chapter's central objectives are to examine the ontological and metaphysical assumptions of the mainstream and postmodern positions, explain the postmodern challenge to mainstream reality, and then to lay the groundwork for demonstrating that this challenge implies a contradiction. The first two objectives will provide the basis for understanding the contradiction, as well as serve as an introduction to epistemological discussions taken up in chapters two and three. The third objective is important to the overall thesis project in three ways. It supports the general objective underpinning this thesis that postmodernists end up relying on mainstream assumptions, in spite of their denial of them. It also supports sub-hypothesis one that postmodernism argues for a discursive version of reality, when in fact it assumes an independent version of it similar to the one it means to reject, resulting in self-contradiction. Finally, sub-hypothesis one provides direct support for the thesis's hypothesis that the postmodernist competing epistemological position's arguments imply self-contradictions.

In section one, I show that the mainstream position assumes that reality is independent of us, and is manifested in the external nature of things like political laws and actors. This claim is similar to philosophical realism, which also assumes the independence of reality. Section two specifies the type of postmodernism dominant in the third debate. Section three continues with a more detailed philosophical account of this postmodernism that reviews the arguments used behind the claims that reality, rather than being independent, is discursively created. In section four I identify how this type of argument is put to use in IR theory, before launching the chapter's central argument:

although postmodernism rejects the mainstream idea of an independent reality, it assumes one nonetheless, resulting in a self-contradiction. This contradiction is not immediately apparent, but is revealed in the fact that the postmodern position on reality cannot offer a valid causal account that supports claims about how real events are discursively created. I argue that the postmodernist who makes claims about real events will either have to take on some mainstream assumptions of reality, or failing that, will just have to admit to be referring to independent reality. With that in place, I then isolate some assumptions of postmodernism to create a broader argument against discursive reality creation in general.

1. The Mainstream and Reality

Here I consider scattered ontological statements taken from a wide variety of IR theorists—ranging from work done in the neo-liberalist to the constructivist tradition—in order to broadly categorize them as being mainstream.[1] The scattered statements share one common element: they assume a reality independent of us. When a clearer picture of this is sketched, I will compare it to philosophical realism.

Discussions with ontology as a central topic are not necessarily common in IR theory, but they have their place. David Dessler locates a central point of mainstream ontological contention in the agent-structure debate.[2] Before I point out some features of this debate, Dessler sums up the importance of discussing ontology when he points out "that a theory's ontology…is both the basis of its explanatory power and the ultimate

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[11] Oddly enough, this is one point that both the mainstream and the postmodernists agree upon. Both Smith and Dessler agree that a useful way of dividing up theorists is by looking at their ontologies. See Steve Smith, "Singing Our World into Existence: International Relations Theory and September 11," *International Studies Quarterly* 48 (2004): 504; David Dessler, "Constructivism within a Positivist Social Science," *Review of International Studies* 25 (1999): 123-37.
[2] David Dessler, "What's at Stake in the Agent-Structure Debate?" *International Organization* 42, no. 3 (Summer 1989): 443.

grounding of claims it may have to superiority over rival theories."[3] Since this is fitting with the thesis's main hypothesis, it makes sense to make elements of the mainstream's ontology clearer to show how it stands up to the postmodern challenge, thereby claiming, in a sense, superiority.

I have chosen to work with the definition of ontology used by Dessler. He says it "refers to the concrete referents of an explanatory discourse…[and] consists of the real-world structures (things, entities) and processes posited by the theory."[4] This definition is spot-on with the one by E. J. Lowe used in philosophy, who defines ontology as "the set of things whose existence is acknowledged by a particular theory or system of thought."[5] Dessler later points out the interaction of these things make up the basis of theory, meaning that theory can only attempt to *explain* the workings of an underlying ontology, rather than *determine* it.[6] Lowe's definition corroborates this, in that the act of acknowledgement he refers to assumes a prior existence. This last statement is important because it reveals a necessary metaphysical distinction: while ontology is a branch of metaphysics that talks about *what exists*, metaphysics generally talks about *the nature of existence*.[7] In this case, the metaphysical point is that the ontology one attempts to theorize about exists independently of us, i.e., the ontological things remain unchanged and indifferent no matter how good (or bad) the theory is. On this view there is a definite separation of reality and theory, where the former exists to create the latter, but not vice

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[3] Dessler, "What's at Stake in the Agent-Structure Debate?" 444.
[4] Dessler, "What's at Stake in the Agent-Structure Debate?" 445.
[5] E. J. Lowe, "Ontology," in *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy,* ed. Ted Honderich (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 634.
[6] Dessler, "What's at Stake in the Agent-Structure Debate?" 445.
[7] Peter van Inwagen, *Metaphysics*, 2nd ed. (Boulder: Westview Press, 2002), 1.

versa.[8] Because the specific ontological things vary within the mainstream position, I will show that it is this metaphysical view that is a unifying factor; i.e., I argue that mainstream IR ontology cannot be characterized as unified, but its metaphysical position can.

In order to pursue this argument, and to make matters simpler, I will stick with the basic ontological categories set out by the agent-structure debate. Put crudely, within IR theory, this debate is focused on whether human agency is the main source of action and causality in international politics, or if these are a product of the structure those agents are a part of.[9] The main protagonists are the well-known structuralist neo-realist position of Kenneth Waltz, and the agential constructivist answer, most fully articulated by Alexander Wendt. It goes without saying that this question invites much discussion beyond the scope of this thesis. I simply wish to point out the shared assumption that, at the very least, the ontology of mainstream IR theories consists of both agents *and* structure, however these are defined. If this concession is granted, it becomes easier to go beyond the subject of debate to focus on one unifying theme—the various theorists mentioned see reality as standing independently of theory.

I will begin on the agent side with the constructivists. Nicholas Onuf argues that "agents act in society to achieve goals,"[10] downplaying the role of structure in the sense that certain structures, such as states, are best seen as extensions of agents. He says,

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[8] This is a very basic expression of metaphysical objectivity, which states, "those statements would be objectively true that correctly described the ultimate or context-independent reality." I believe the mainstream is metaphysically objectivist, but this would necessitate a divergent discussion. I believe the simpler expression of this position above is preferable, given the terms of the discussion between the mainstreamers and postmodernists. See van Inwagen, *Metaphysics*, 84.
[9] Dessler, "What's at Stake in the Agent-Structure Debate?" 443.
[10] Nicholas Onuf, "Constructivism: A User's Manual," in *International Relations in a Constructed World*, ed. Vendulka Kubálková, Nicholas Onuf,and Paul Kowert. (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1998), 60.

"states, through their agents, conduct their relations in an anarchic world."[11] Skipping over many important distinctions, agents' actions are either guided by rules,[12] or by the "shared knowledge in which they are embedded,"[13] both of which are the products of agential agreement. The point in mentioning this is to signal how constructivists conceive their method of theorizing, which can be characterized as fitting within the mainstream metaphysical position in IR theory.[14] Although they study human agency, there is a certain distance they take from their subject. For instance leading constructivists Katzenstein, Jepperson, and Wendt have recently pointed out, "When…[constructivists] attempt explanation, they engage in 'normal science,' with its usual desiderata in mind."[15] Other constructivists have viewed their research likewise. Friedman and Starr contend that much recent constructivist work is "compatible with a positivist epistemology"[16] with the same metaphysical attitude I have attributed to the mainstream.[17] In this way it is possible to affirm that many constructivist theorists regard their subject matter as independent of them, placing them within the metaphysical position described above.

Another theory that falls on the agent side is classical realism. In order to see this, I will consider its definitive statement by Hans Morgenthau.[18] Morgenthau argued for the "objectivity of the laws of politics," in that these can be "ascertained only through the

[11] Onuf, "Constructivism: A User's Manual," 62.
[12] Onuf, "Constructivism: A User's Manual," 62.
[13] Alexander Wendt, "Constructing International Politics," *International Security* 20 (1995): 73.
[14] Dessler, "Constructivism within a Positivist Social Science," 123-37.
[15] Peter J. Katzenstein, ed., *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1996), 65.
[16] Katzenstein, ed., *The Culture of National Security,* 81.
[17] Dessler, "Constructivism within a Positivist Social Science," 124.
[18] John A. Vasquez, *Classics of International Relations,* 3rd ed. (Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 1996), 2.

examination of the political acts preformed."[19] The way this was to be done is to put ourselves in the seat of the statesman, consider the rational alternatives for action, and choose the most rational in that situation.[20] Of course, Morgenthau's theory implies many more assumptions, and much more subtlety than this, but the basic point is that he emphasizes the rational agent above anything else.

Morgenthau is also explicit in separating facts from theory. He says,

[Realism] believes also…in the possibility of distinguishing in politics between truth and opinion—between what is true objectively and rationally, supported by evidence and illuminated by reason, and what is only a subjective judgment, divorced from the facts as they are and informed by prejudice and wishful thinking.[21]

In placing an emphasis on the contrast between objective truth and subjective judgment, Morgenthau acknowledges the independent nature of reality. This is revealed most when he speaks of the "facts as they are" and how these place limits on subjective judgment. Here he goes beyond an individual point of view toward an objectivity that is characteristically mainstream.[22] Also, his comments, combined with those of the constructivists above, have briefly shown that the agent side of the debate is in line with the basic metaphysical position of the mainstream. It remains to be seen if the same holds for the structure side.

This side is headed by Waltz and his neo-realist position. Waltz describes his position in an analogy with microeconomic structure: just as markets determine the self-interested behaviors of individual economic units, the international political structure

[19] Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, 4th ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967), 4.
[20] Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations,* 5.
[21] Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations,* 4.
[22] See note 8 of this chapter.

determines the self-interested behaviors of the individual political units (states).[23] How this works is, "from the coaction of like units emerges a structure that affects and constrains all of them. Once formed, a market becomes a force in itself, and a force that the constitutive units acting singly or in small numbers cannot control."[24] The structure is then further defined by the arrangement of the structure, and once this is formed, structure becomes "impervious to attempts to modify it or control its effects."[25] In a subsequent article where he defends whether his theory is relevant in post-Cold War times, Waltz poses the question of what the necessary changes would be that would force a change of theory, and answers himself by saying, "[c]hanges *of* the system would do it."[26] This simple statement shows that Waltz assumes the view that reality precedes theory, in that external conditions mark whether a theory needs changing or updating. His assumption points him toward a series of independent facts about structure and system both before and after the Cold War, where it would have to be determined if what made his theory relevant then exists presently. This case is similar to Morgenthau's in that appeal to the facts, or evidence, is the test to whether the theory is valid or not. This assumption places Waltz's neo-realism within the metaphysical position I have attributed to the mainstream.

The final theory I want to consider on the structure side is Robert Keohane's neo-liberalism, which he defends in an article that has gained subsequent notoriety.[27]

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[23] Dessler, "What's at Stake in the Agent-Structure Debate?" 443.
[24] Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1979), 90.
[25] Dessler, "What's at Stake in the Agent-Structure Debate?" 450.
[26] Kenneth N. Waltz, "Structural Realism after the Cold War," *International Security* 25, no. 1 (Summer 2000): 5.
[27] The notoriety stems from Keohane's claims that postmodernism will be doomed to stay at the edges of IR theory, based on the fact that they do not propose a research proposal. Postmodernists have taken this as proving their power/knowledge argument, in the sense that because postmodernism does not conform to certain standards, it fails as a viable alternative to mainstream theory. This matter will be returned in greater detail when epistemology is discussed. Steve Smith, "Positivism and Beyond," in *International Theory: Positivism and Beyond,* eds. Steve Smith, Ken Booth, and Marysia Zalewski (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 12.

Keohane's view can be classified as putting structure before agency because he focuses on institutions, drawing a distinction between a "*general pattern or categorization* of activity," and "a *particular* human-constructed arrangement, formally or informally organized."[28] These organized patterns bring forth rules and norms, which can form practices as well as specific institutions. More important to my discussion, he notes of an institution that "the rules must be durable, and must prescribe behavorial roles for actors, besides constraining activity and shaping expectations."[29] Such institutions become the basis of the formal organizations that make up the international system, or complexes of rules and organizations that limit action on the international scene.[30] When the structure is set as such, rational action within that system becomes ideal to judge objectively. Keohane believes the ideal manner for this is through "empirical research," and demands that "genuine research programs [be created]…ways of discovering new facts and developing insightful interpretations of international institutions."[31] This latter comment is very close to being exclusively epistemological, but I believe that Keohane is also acknowledging ("ways of discovering new facts") the sort of separation of reality and theory that characterizes the mainstream. The metaphysical attitude is present with Keohane because he shares the view that reality exists apart from us and must be discovered and understood in order to form improved theories of it. This attitude, combined with Waltz's, shows that advocates on the structure side are also committed to the metaphysical position that reality exists independently of us.

As I have shown, mainstream ontology may vary, but the metaphysical position

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[28] Robert Keohane, "International Institutions: Two Approaches," 285 [original emphasis].
[29] Keohane, "International Institutions: Two Approaches," 287.
[30] Keohane, "International Institutions: Two Approaches," 287.
[31] Keohane, "International Institutions: Two Approaches," 302.

does not. John Vasquez sums this position up when he stated that, "*[t]he word 'reality'* *refers to this resistance of the world to conform to every imaginable conception humans* *create*."[32] This statement is important for two reasons. First, in terms of ontology, the fact that different elements are given more importance than others does not mean that there is a fundamental discord in the mainstream position. Moravcsik notes that for theoretical solidarity the basic minimum ontological requirement is coherence, and if that is present then theories "need not share a full range of basic ontological assumptions."[33] That is certainly the case amongst the four examples given. Furthermore, this could be interpreted as offering greater explanatory power, which will become clearer in terms of offering causal arguments in IR theory, as we will later see. Second, it makes very clear exactly what the relationship between theory and reality is for the mainstream. I have shown that several theories, while not agreeing on important details, can agree on a major unifying fact. This is important because it synthesizes a complicated point in an accessible fashion. It shows how a common starting place for IR theory is in fact a more weighty metaphysical statement, the understanding of which is not far off in abstract discussion, but rather right in front of our noses. To further support this, I will now draw out some similarities between the mainstream position and philosophical realism.

These positions, as I stated before, have much in common. Philosophical realism is a metaphysical position about things and their properties and holds that both exist "independent of anyone's beliefs, linguistic practices, conceptual schemes, and so on."[34] Bertrand Russell argued for such a position when he said, "[t]he first truism to which I

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[32] Vasquez, "The Post-Positivist Debate," 225 [original emphasis].
[33] Andrew Moravcsik, "Theory Synthesis in International Relations: Real Not Metaphysical," 132.
[34] Alexander Miller, "Realism," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2005 Edition)*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2005/entries/realism/ (accessed July 3, 2008).

wish to draw your attention is that the world contains *facts,* which are what they are whatever we may choose to think about them."[35] Elsewhere, Russell said, "I mean by a 'fact' something which is there, whether anybody thinks so or not."[36] Both of these statements bluntly make the case for the realistic *nature* of facts, and in this usage there is no danger if we understand facts to mean a theory's ontology, following Dessler and Lowe's definitions. Besides being a case for the autonomy of facts, realism is also used to argue for truth. On this view, the truth of a belief or statement is bestowed by the world containing that fact, meaning that, if a statement is not meaningless or vague, "truth and falsity are conferred on those beliefs and assertions by their *objects,* by the things they are *about.*"[37] This truth argument will be returned to in chapter three, where the normative nature of epistemology is discussed. It will be noticed that both elements, the nature of facts and of truth, are visible throughout the mainstream position, though rarely stated outright.

This final observation is important because it points out the mainstream's unstated acceptance of philosophical realism. Such a position gives assurance in the sense that there is a constant check on theory i.e., there are limits to what can be said about reality, and it is reality that sets those limits. This is not to say that we cannot discover anything new, as Keohane pointed out above. Furthermore, the acceptance of such a position holds important advantages for IR theory building, as well as the use of theory for real-world application, topics I do not discuss here.[38] Mainly for this thesis, understanding the philosophical connections to the mainstream will help one

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[35] Russell quoted in Wetzel, "States of Affairs,"
[36] Bertrand Russell, *Human Knowledge: Its Scope and Limits* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1948), 159.
[37] Van Inwagen, *Metaphysics,* 73.
[38] See D. S. L. Jarvis, *International Relations and the Challenge of Postmodernism: Defending the Discipline* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2000), chap 1; see also Dessler, "What's at Stake in the Agent-Structure Debate?" 450.

understanding the postmodern challenge. First, it should now be clear exactly what assumptions are challenged. Second, when the contradiction of the postmodern position is spelled out, it should become clear exactly why the postmodernists contradict themselves. And finally, because this position *does* stand up to the challenge, I believe this reveals its superiority to the postmodern alternative within the given framework of competing epistemological positions.

2. Postmodernism: The Challenge

As mentioned earlier in this thesis, it is possible to characterize postmodernism as a complete rejection of the mainstream position, both in metaphysics and epistemology. In response to the development of the mainstream position up to this point, postmodernists contest the fact that reality is "out there," independent of us. Furthermore, they argue that it is dependent on us, that it is *created* by our theories, language, etc. Of course, this would be a caricature of postmodernism as a whole, and for that reason it is best for me to use this section to explain the type of postmodernism I will be dealing with.

Darryl Jarvis provides a detailed study of postmodernism that separates different themes, or "motifs" of postmodernism that differ along epistemological and ontological lines.[39] I will stick with Jarvis's motifs, mainly for their heuristic value, but also because of the vast ground they cover without fudging detail. He calls the first motif "Postmodernism as Technological Change" where postmodernism refers to a description of society taking note of objective changes in technology, culture, society, and politics in the present late-capitalism phase.[40] As this description mentions, postmodernism

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[39] Jarvis, *International Relations and the Challenge of Postmodernism,* 66-88.
[40] Jarvis, *International Relations and the Challenge of Postmodernism,* 67.

comments mainly on societal change and people's attitudes towards this, and he later notes that these range from the positive, e.g., improved technology, to the negative, e.g., alienation due to such change. In either case though, a shared perspective on society and knowledge emerges: the breakdown of social, political, and territorial boundaries accompanied by transnational/cultural production imply vast new interpretations of identity; and knowledge is seen as a product or commodity, depending on who has it.[41] It does not imply the repudiation of knowledge as such, but rather, in Lyotard's words, "that the *status* of knowledge is altered as societies enter what is known as the postindustrial age and cultures enter what is known as the postmodern age."[42] In Lyotard's view, knowledge's status changes to that of being a discourse, a concept explained below. It should be noted that this position is not entirely antagonistic to the versions of reality or epistemology I hold, but I do not focus on that here.

The second motif is called "Postmodernism as Critical Epistemology," and is characterized by its more active stance in political theory, specifically post-Marxist political theory.[43] Authors from this motif "have turned their attentions to articulating critical social and political theories that attempt to uncover the epistemic structures responsible for postmodern social, political, and economic life."[44] Specifically to post-Marxian thinking, this meant "shedding the reductionism and structuralism of Marxist theory," to give way "to more complex theoretical undertakings that challenge notions of patriarchy, gender, linguistics, science, and power."[45] While this motif stays within the

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[41] Jarvis, *International Relations and the Challenge of Postmodernism,* 68-71.
[42] Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge,* trans. G. Bennington and B. Massumi, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 3.
[43] Jarvis, *International Relations and the Challenge of Postmodernism,* 72-3.
[44] Jarvis, *International Relations and the Challenge of Postmodernism,* 73.
[45] Jarvis, *International Relations and the Challenge of Postmodernism,* 74.

boundaries of "classical varieties of critical thought,"[46] it creates a particular political attitude that is taken over by the third motif, discussed below, and for that reason deserves particular attention. In the introduction to the thesis I called this attitude the politics of inclusion, and we can now see that it stems from the observation that classical metanarratives have traditionally overlooked multiple minorities. Jarvis quotes Zygmunt Bauman in saying that the politics of inclusion is "marked by a view of the human world as irreducibly and irrevocably pluralistic, split into a multiple of sovereign units and sites of authority, with no horizontal or vertical order."[47] So not only do classical forms of study overlook this pluralism, they are in error if they even presuppose they can include them. Yet this motif feeds into a more radical version of itself, a version which rejects any classical form of study, and which characterizes the postmodernism that this thesis deals with.

This third motif is called "Postmodernism as Subversion," but for ease of expression I will continue to simply call it postmodernism, as it is this motif that makes up the postmodern challenge to the mainstream. Whereas the previous motifs worked within one classical framework or another, this motif is characterized by "deconstructing logocentric practices, binary logic, and the presumption that we can speak for the marginalized (other)…they attempt to dismantle organonist knowledge systems that, by and large, have been the hallmark of the Western intellectual tradition."[48] Examples of such "systems" would be mainstream reality and epistemology. It was mentioned before that, like the second motif, this third motif is motivated by politics of inclusion, but unlike the second motif, which aims to show marginalization within particular areas, the

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[46] Jarvis, *International Relations and the Challenge of Postmodernism,* 75.
[47] Jarvis, *International Relations and the Challenge of Postmodernism,* 75.
[48] Jarvis, *International Relations and the Challenge of Postmodernism,* 76.

present motif aims to show how marginalization is present within the entire *system*.[49]

The way this is carried out is by taking its own (anti)metaphysical position on reality, one which makes language the basic object of study. Language is construed variously as texts, discourse, or writing, and is argued as being socially constructed and lacking any determinate (universal) meaning.[50] Of course, language *is* about something, but this recognition is the recognition of a power move, i.e., "that all cognitive representations of this world are historically and linguistically mediated."[51] The link to the politics of inclusion is the argument that the meaning given by a particular term or discourse creates a dichotomy that favors one interpretation or representation over another, the preference for which comes from the values inherent within that system. But because of the control over representations, or signs, a control which extends *beyond* mere words, postmodernists argue that there is a sense in which reality is created through the manipulation of signs. Postmodernism seeks to expose such practices by resisting power impositions, thus opening thinking spaces[52] and reducing the violence inflicted on numerous people throughout the world.[53] In IR theory, this means showing how mainstream theory is responsible for such violence. Before we look at those arguments, however, a more detailed treatment of the metaphysical position of postmodernism is needed.

3. Postmodern Anti-Metaphysics, or Postmodern Metaphysics?

The title of this section is derived from the contrariety that comes from the

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[49] Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology,* trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1976), 46.
[50] Jarvis, *International Relations and the Challenge of Postmodernism,* 82.
[51] Steven Best and Douglas Kellner, *Postmodern Theory: Critical Interrogations* (New York: Guilford Press, 1991), 4.
[52] Jim George, *Discourses of Global Politics: A Critical (Re)Introduction to International Relations* (Boulder: Lynne Reinner, 1994), xi.
[53] Steve Smith, "Singing Our World into Existence," 507.

postmodernists' attitude towards metaphysics. As was briefly shown above, postmodernists take an oppositional position towards mainstream metaphysics. The position is anti-metaphysical in the sense attributed by Richard Rorty, that postmodernists,

> are trying to shake off the influences of the peculiarly metaphysical dualisms which the Western philosophical tradition inherited from the Greeks… . They are trying to replace the world pictures constructed with the aid of these Greek oppositions with a picture of a flux of continually changing relations.[54]

Nevertheless, they seem to be making the same kind of claims we saw above in the section of philosophical realism: i.e., claims about the ultimate nature of reality. My reason for this comes from the fact that in making the sort of discourse creating reality arguments we are about to see, they talk "of the *nature…*of what it is for there to be a fact of any sort in the first place,"[55] and for this reason, is a metaphysical statement. This points to the conclusion that postmodern metaphysics are opposed to *a* dominant tradition in metaphysics, but still make up a metaphysical position nonetheless. I believe a more precise way of stating their position is not that they are *anti*-metaphysical, but rather anti-metaphysical-in-the-Western-tradition. As this suggests, the postmodern challenge is directed more at the mainstream metaphysical position, although it also opposes itself to mainstream ontology, as I will point out below.

Three main concepts are necessary and sufficient for showing the basic form taken by postmodernist challenge: anti-logocentrism, discourse, and power.[56] In a crude

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[54] Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and Social Hope* (London: Penguin Books, 1999), 47.
[55] Boghossian, *Fear of Knowledge,* 26 [original emphasis].
[56] Although I must stress that this is *basic,* because of course different authors within this motif may vary in detail. However, the statement is justified in one way, in the sense that these three concepts are necessary and sufficient for the position of the authors that I am writing about here. These can be narrowed down to two: Derrida and Foucault (and to a lesser extent Rorty). This can be further justified in that these two authors make up the theoretical background from

formulation, the three are related in this way: anti-logocentrism frees us from the mistaken logocentric tendency that language correctly represents reality, allowing us to notice, rather, that language derives meaning from other language, or, that discourse creates further discourse. Power plays an integral role in all of this, namely, in perpetuating logocentric meanings and creating dominant discourses derived from those meanings, in a way, creating reality. But because of the dual nature of power, resistance may be offered as an alternative to creating new discourses, which avoid the various pitfalls of power discourse. We will now discuss each of these in turn.

Logocentrism was a main preoccupation of Jacques Derrida, who believed that logocentric meaning was produced in "all the Western methods of analysis, explication, reading, or interpretation."[57] Logocentrism is the belief that the signs of a language perfectly represent their meanings, and that those meanings may perfectly represent something non-mental—that "language is at its best when it is perfectly transparent to reality—'identical with its objects.'"[58] But Derrida believed that this simple formulation is mistaken. He argued that at the same time as creating such a metaphysical presence (logocentric meaning), a similar *absence* is created, in that when the word is used subsequently, it is used in a different "transcendental present," a space in which the logocentric object is present with all other possible "entities" that may be signified by that word.[59] The original word, however, with that logocentric attachment, or "trace," as he called it, excludes *the possibility* of those other entities from being signified by that

which IR theorists work from, at least key authors such as Steve Smith and Jim George. To see each of these IR theorist's various inheritance from these postmodernists, see George, *Discourses of Global Politics*, introduction; Steve Smith, *The Geneaology of a Discipline.*

[57] Derrida, *Of Grammatology,* 46.

[58] Richard Rorty, *Essays on Heidegger and Others* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 130.

[59] Derrida, *Of Grammatology,* 47

word, or in other words, "the trace must be thought before the entity."[60] He then argued that this trace (alternately called an "instituted trace,") moves onward historically in systems of linguistic signs, and that this is cultural rather than natural.[61]

Yet Derrida pointed out a problem with the metaphysical attachments of the trace, since as he saw it, when linguistic signs are passed on the movement is from "sign to sign,"[62] and when that move is made, possible logocentric meaning is absorbed into the new meaning and now serves only as that form which allows it to be determined from among other signs, and whose metaphysical presence becomes obvious only on the surface of the word.[63] This subsequently forms a pattern that moves ahead indefinitely. His position is that, "from the moment that there is meaning there are nothing but signs. We *think only in signs,*"[64] and suggested instead we think of language as a "play of differences."[65] This is anti-logocentrism, summed up nicely by Rorty who said "signs have meaning by virtue of the relations to other signs…To say this is to emphasize the context-sensitivity of signs and of thoughts—to treat them not as quasi-things but as nodes in a web of relations."[66] What Derrida has done here is essentially shaken off a tradition originating from the Greeks, obvious in the objectivity of philosophical realism, and he has created a basis for language and reality that has been pushed to far-reaching conclusions. But to understand these we must first turn to a few more concepts.

The next concept is discourse. There are numerous uses of 'discourse', and all of

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[60] Derrida, *Of Grammatology,* 47
[61] Derrida, *Of Grammatology,* 46-8.
[62] Derrida, *Of Grammatology,* 48.
[63] Derrida, *Of Grammatology,* 49-50.
[64] Derrida, *Of Grammatology,* 50 [original emphasis].
[65] Although Derrida only referred to this new view of language as simply "play." Rorty attributes the "of differences", which does no harm to Derrida's position, because, as we have seen, the description 'play of differences' refers correctly to the way language remains after Derrida's treatment. Derrida, *Of Grammatology,* 50; Rorty, *Essays on Heidegger and Others,* 130.
[66] Rorty, *Essays on Heidegger and Others,* 130-1.

these together are too dispersed to make sense of the use I will be talking about here. So to narrow it down substantially, I will be working with Michel Foucault's definition of discourse, and in particular, some important distinctions he draws attention to. He says,

> [i]nstead of gradually reducing the rather fluctuating meaning of the word 'discourse' I believe I have in fact added to its meanings: treating it as sometimes the general domain of all statements, sometimes as an individualisable group of statements, and sometimes as a regulated practice that accounts for a number of statements.[67]

The first two distinctions refer to the grouping element of the concept, that is, discourse refers here to a group, or groups, of statements. This distinction is useful insofar as it says what discourses *are*, but it is rather broad and unspecific. Most of what is important about discourses comes from Foucault's second distinction, that of discourse being a "regulated practice that accounts for a number of statements." In this sense, we can begin to see discourses not *only* as statements, but also as a controlling factor in the production of more statements, controlling—taking on board earlier conclusions about anti-logocentrism—what we are able to think about a certain subject. This may seem like a big step, but consider what Foucault has said about this control in reference to 17th century attitudes towards sex,

> [a]s if in order to gain mastery over it in reality, it had first been necessary to subjugate it at the level of language, control its free circulation in speech, expunge it from the things that were said, and extinguish the words that rendered it too visibly present…Without even having to pronounce the word, modern prudishness was able to ensure that one did not speak of sex, merely through the interplay of prohibitions that referred back to one another: instances of muteness which, by dint of saying nothing, imposed silence.[68]

The first thing to notice about this passage is the obvious regulative practices of discourse

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[67] Foucault, *Power Knowledge and Other Interviews,* 80.
[68] Foucault, *The Foucault Reader,* 301.

that he describes. The second thing, which is more important, is what this implies about thinking.

One thing to notice from the previous passage is how it begins. Foucault says "[a]s if in order to gain mastery over it in reality," before he begins to describe how discourses regulate. This statement can be interpreted thus: that discourses can regulate what we think on a given subject. To make this argument I will begin with Derrida's assumption of linguistic signs, how they are passed from one frame of reference to another and carry with them their meanings. This assumption is then combined with Foucault's regulative discourse function, so that we can see how only specific words are passed on, or conversely, repressed. This is enough to conclude that a discourse can control the statements or words being said,[69] which allows us to infer that a discourse can control the signs that are in play at a given time. Since, as Derrida argues, we "think only in signs," we can then conclude that discourses can control what we think.

But is this really a metaphysical statement? I believe not, but it is very close to being one. Accepting the control of signs and statements, we should recall what Rorty said about treating words "as nodes in a web of relations," and then Derrida's, point that,

> There have never been anything but supplements, substitutive significations which could only come forth in a chain of differential references, the "real" supervening, and being added only while taking on meaning from a trace and from an invocation of the supplement, etc. And thus to infinity, for we have read, *in the text,* that the absolute present, Nature, that which words like "real mother" name, have always already escaped, have never existed; that what opens meaning and language is writing as the

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[69] I believe that it can apply for both because, as we saw in Foucault's definition of discourse, he was talking about statements. Then in the passage about discourse repression, he was ambivalent as to whether he was talking about a single word "sex" or all statements about sex. In any case, he tells how "sex" was repressed, as were, I assume, the numerous statements about it. For that reason I believe that discursive function can range over statements and singular words.

disappearance of natural presence.[70]

What these authors are saying is that as language advances through discourse, meaning is produced at different stages of discourse, and those meanings are all the reference points that any linguistic sign can ever be. Derrida's conclusion then, is that *"There is nothing outside the text,"*[71] meaning that in language's passage, we have replaced what is "real," and more significantly, have eliminated its existence. Discursive meaning becomes what was before assumed to be existence. Here is where the postmodernists show their complete opposition to mainstream ontology, which posits the existence of real objects in the world. Furthermore, due to the absence of the real and to fixed points to reality, Derrida and Foucault's arguments can be taken together imply that a complete control over reality is possible i.e., control over discursive reality. That is, as Derrida concludes, if there *is* nothing outside texts, discursive control, as Foucault suggests, can clearly be said to create reality because it is what has a hold over the signs that make up those texts. So Foucault's comments can be taken as implying more than control over thinking: they form part of the basis for any discursive reality-creating argument. That surely is a metaphysical statement, and it should be clear how, in placing language (theory) ahead of reality, it stands in opposition to the mainstream position.

So far we have traced a big step in the postmodern argument, which is how their metaphysical position becomes possible. The two main concepts for that were language and discourses, but one important concept has been left out—power. Power, like discourse, is too broad to be useful as a concept without further clarification. So the definition of power that I will be using is that which controls the regulating function of a

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[70] Derrida, *Of Grammatology,* 158-9 [original emphasis].
[71] Derrida, *Of Grammatology,* 158 [original emphasis].

discourse. Of course, on the face of it this seems like a narrow and weak role, but this in fact implies much more than appears obvious.[72] For example, having control of discourse means not only control over individuals, but (taking on the above assumptions) having control over reality. Foucault argues,

> we must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms…power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production.[73]

This type of production or control makes power an action which is guided by interests. Derrida called them cultural interests, but he was unspecific of who held them. Foucault's idea is much different though, because he thinks that power can be exercised by the powerful *and* the powerless.[74] That is, discourse turned around and used against those in power. This dual role of power is what makes Foucault's analysis so popular, because added to the metaphysical position seen so far, it can explain the doing and the undoing, of much of the wrongs within a particular area like IR theory.

It is useful to now turn to particular application of such a position within IR theory, to expose a contradiction in postmodernism that goes beyond the contrarieties mentioned at the beginning of this particular section. I argue that despite postmodernists' rejection of a mainstream version of reality, they are in fact assuming one: that when they talk about the world "out there," they are really talking about the world "out there," regardless of the plausibility of the arguments we have seen up to this point.

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[72] Here it is necessary to mention the concept of bio-power, which is the discursive creation of subjects and "a dynamic of control and lack of control between discourses and the subjects, constituted by discourses, who are their agents. Power is exercised within discourses in the ways in which they constitute and govern individual subjects." Bio-power shows other applications of power, but strays from the discussion at hand. Chris Weedon, *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory* (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1987), 113.

[73] Foucault, *Foucault Reader,* 205.

[74] He says, "In short, this power is exercised rather that possessed; it is not the "privilege," acquired or preserved, of the dominant class, but the overall effect of its strategic positions—an effect that is manifested and sometimes extended by the position of those who are dominated." Foucault, *Foucault Reader,* 174.

4. The Contradiction

 To begin with, I want to make it clear what I mean by contradiction. Contradiction here is used in the sense of informal logic, in which it is a fallacy that is committed when one inconsistently asserts contradictory premises in his or her argument.[75] To highlight a case where contradictory premises are asserted, a recent article that follows the line offered here as the postmodern metaphysical position is particularly useful. For Steve Smith's, "Singing Our World into Existence: International Relations Theory and September 11," gives a good demonstration of how postmodern arguments can be applied to a specific case.

The article's title makes it self-evident that those arguments are intended to link IR theory to the events of September 11, in the sense of a Foucauldian discursive control. Smith confirms this with his main argument, is worth quoting at length.

> I want to claim the ways in which the discipline, *our* discipline…constructs the categories of thought within which we explain the world, helps to reinforce Western, predominantly U.S., practices of statecraft that themselves reflect an underlying set of social forces.[76]
>
> …I do feel that all of us in the discipline need to reflect on the possibility that both the ways in which we have constructed theories about world politics, and the content of those theories, have supported specific social forces and have essentially, if quietly, unquestioningly, and innocently, taken sides on major ethical and political questions. In that light I need to ask about the extent to which International Relations has been one voice

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[75] Douglas N. Walton, *Informal Logic: A Handbook for Critical Argumentation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 124-6.
[76] Smith, "Singing Our World into Existence," 499.

singing into existence the world that made September 11 possible.[77]

At the outset, this argument exhibits the Foucault's dual role of power—Smith is clearly arguing that certain social forces (i.e., powers) lie behind the discursive control of modern IR theory, and likewise that a careful enough reflection of this will help reveal these forces, and allow for some change. Indeed, he follows the main argument with just this type of appeal when he says, "I will take this opportunity to ask each and every one of us about our role in September 11, and thereby to reflect on the link between our work, either in writing or teaching, and international events."[78] Two quick comments are in order here. One, this commits a fallacy, in that calling "us" terrorists is a startling accusation, and this of course would make the emotional need to become leery of social forces and whatnot.[79] For this reason, I will not deal with this aspect of Smith's argument. And two, because Smith focuses only on discursive practices (writing and teaching) we can assume he will be working within the postmodern position as we have seen. What reasons does Smith use to back up his arguments about discursive reality?

Smith relies on three interlocking reasons to support his main argument. The first is the fact-value distinction, the second is IR as a vocation, and the third is his 10 core assumptions of the mainstream. The first reason is an idea he attributes to Max Weber, who argued for a separation of fact and value, in that once values are introduced, a full understanding of facts is blocked because interest in one will always affect understanding of the other, and vice versa. Smith argues that IR theorists have taken this to heart,

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[77] I recognize, at the outset, that this also implies a slight inconsistency, because as we have just seen, postmodernists reject such "real" events. I would argue though that it seems to me that Smith does not take such an extreme ontological position as Derrida argues for. When Smith argues for the creation of reality, he mainly works within Foucauldian terms, which ambiguously implies a reality in the sense of the mainstream, in that one talks about real things in the world. So Smith's argument is actually more radical in the sense that he is arguing for a discursively created "real" reality, rather than just the textual sense Derrida referred to. Smith, "Singing Our World into Existence," 500.
[78] Smith, "Singing Our World into Existence," 500.
[79] Douglas N. Walton, *Informal Logic*, 82-3.

mistakenly thinking that they are "'merely' reporting on the world of politics," rather than being morally involved.[80] This has caused a push for making IR more like a "legitimate social science" that favors methodologies modeled after ones from more successful social sciences like economics.[81] However, Smith argues, the very idea of a separation from moral involvement is mistaken. He points out that the methodologies chosen are "located within" the dominant academic community (an extension from the dominant world power), and in the end can be reduced to "political assumptions masquerading as technical ones."[82] So rather than producing objective knowledge of the world, this method is performing a "sleight of hand, by pretending that the world is 'out there.'"[83] The whole fact/value distinction is mistaken for Smith because every view is loaded with assumptions, making it impossible for us to separate ourselves from them.[84] This idea is extended into Smith's second reason, IR theory as a vocation.

IR theory as a vocation has to do with another Weberian idea that Smith applies to the discipline.[85] He believes that, just as the fact/value separation is a mistake, it is also a mistake to think of the study of IR as a *strictly academic* enterprise. Rather, he argues,

> I do not think that academics can avoid the moral and political ramifications of their scholarship, since that scholarship is based in a set of social forces toward which it is either supportive…or opposed. In essence, then, scholarship cannot be neutral; it is unavoidably partial, is unavoidably political, and unavoidably has ethical consequences.[86]

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[80] Smith, "Singing Our World into Existence," 500.
[81] Smith lists the main one as rational choice theory, which "treats actors as rational, self-interested maximizers of utility (however that is defined)." Smith, "Singing Our World into Existence," 502.
[82] Smith, "Singing Our World into Existence," 503.
[83] Smith, "Singing Our World into Existence," 503.
[84] Smith, "Singing Our World into Existence," 503.
[85] Very simply put, the idea is that in politics, assuming that its means are predominantly violence, one always stands in a position to commit violence onto another, whether through immediate actions, or long-term consequences. One can assume an ethic of responsibility though, which guides action and can minimize the effects of this violence, but nevertheless, in politics one cannot escape this situation. Smith, "Singing Our World into Existence," 503-4.
[86] Smith, "Singing Our World into Existence," 504.

The sort of ethical consequences he has in mind is violence unto others, but this is not violence in the traditional sense. Rather, it has to do with Smith's main argument that mainstream IR theorists *create a violent world*.[87] That is, Smith is making an ontological claim to the effect that mainstream IR theory has created a certain violent "real" reality, violence which includes but is not exhausted by September 11. This can be better understood after seeing the third main support for his argument, the 10 core assumptions of IR theory.[88] Overall, he wants to emphasize that these are "trapped within a set of methodological, epistemological, and thereby, ontological lenses,"[89] which in other words means that whatever is defined epistemologically creates what exists ontologically. This point is absolutely crucial to Smith's argument, as it can be recognized as a rephrased version of the postmodern metaphysical position, in that certain discursive controls are used over the production of language, which then shapes reality. Smith presents the 10 assumptions as a way to argue how the mainstream "help[ed] to create the world that led to the events of September 11,"[90] but I believe this to be a problematic argument that implies a very serious contradiction.

The reason I believe this to be a problematic argument is because it assumes too important an influence for IR theory in real-world events. This is not meant as a metaphysical counter-argument, but it leads into the contradiction I attribute to Smith's

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[87] Smith makes it very clear that his "focus is on the core assumptions of the mainstream, and how they are implicated in the events of September 11," noting that not every mainstream theorist and approach is implicated, but that as a whole the mainstream "has adopted many of the assumptions and practices which follow." Smith, "Singing Our World into Existence," 504.

[88] These are 1) the state as the unit of analysis rather than the individual or humanity; 2) "a distinction between the inside and outside of the state;" 3) "a clear distinction between economics and politics;" 4) "the notion of a common progression of humanity toward one end-state" (globalization); 5) "the absence of considerations of gender and ethnicity from the main theories;" 6) pervading definition of violence (restricted to war); 7) "the stress on structure over agency;" 8) "the idea of one, universal rationality underlying the more popular theories;" 9) "underplaying of the importance of issues of identity in theories of international relations;" and 10) "the discipline is dominated by the search for explanation rather than understanding." Smith, "Singing Our World into Existence," 504-7.

[89] Smith, "Singing Our World into Existence," 504.

[90] Smith, "Singing Our World into Existence," 504.

reality-creating argument, which is metaphysical. Smith assumes that the discursive

power he argues mainstream IR theory to have over other IR theorists is the same as the

discursive power of mainstream IR theory over actors in international politics. Smith's

arguments may be feasible in the first case, but not in the second. If there is a discursive

connection of IR theory to IR theory, that does not imply a similar connection from IR

theory to international political actors.[91] This premise has not gone unnoticed in IR

theory, and several authors agree on the point. Peter Haas, in his study of epistemic

communities and their relevance to state policy decisions,[92] observes that while epistemic

communities are acknowledged, "state behavior…remains strongly conditioned by the

distribution of power internationally. …the range of impact [of epistemic communities]

remains conditioned and bounded by international and national structural realities."[93]

Haas's observations also bring up an important point to which I will return later. Other

authors have commented roughly the same thing.[94] At best, there is a suggestion of the

possibility of a weak form of discursive power, but it is one nowhere near as strong as

Smith argues for.

But even granting this stronger form of discursive power that IR theory supposedly

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[91] There is an influence in the sense that IR theory is influenced by the larger political system (discussed above), which could be expressed as a discursive connection from political system to IR theory to international political actors, but this only explains the first two discursive connections, and not the third. There is still a gap there that I believe cannot be accounted for given the postmodernist's present argument.

[92] Epistemic communities are "a network of professionals with recognized expertise and competence in a particular domain and an authoritative claim to policy-relevant knowledge within that domain or issue-area." This certainly applies to particular specialized areas of IR theory, and indeed, some of the authors whose work Haas cites are prominent IR theorists, such as G. John Ikenberry and Emanuel Adler. Peter M. Haas, "Introduction: Epistemic Communities and International Policy Coordination," *International Organization* 46, no. 1 (Winter 1992), 1-35.

[93] Haas, "Introduction," 7.

[94] Fred Halliday flatly denies any real-world influence of IR theory, arguing that "for those who make foreign policy, the theoretical world of IR is an alien, and irrelevant, field, if not indeed one of whose very existence they are unaware." Finally, some authors admit a sort of compromise, such as Michael Nicholson, who argues that much of what goes on in IR theory is irrelevant to state actors and policy makers, but *may* have future relevance, in the same sense of Keynes's famous remark. "Practical men, who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influences, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist." Michael Nicholson, "What's the use of International Relations," *Review of International Studies* 26 (2000), 184; Fred Halliday, "International Relations and its Discontents," 739.

has over political actors, could Smith's argument about discursive reality succeed? I still believe not, for the following reasons.

Granting that IR theory can inform international political actors, and exert discursive power that implies that they see the world in a certain way and act in a certain way, is not to say that IR theory influences *all* the external factors that arise on which those actors make decisions. Assuming Smith's own limited focus on the mainstream, we would have to admit that the areas and actors that fall under his analysis only reach so far. In other words, Smith creates an *other*, a non-mainstream reality not controlled by the mainstream that the mainstream interacts with and which mainstream IR theory cannot explain or be expected to explain. Haas effectively pointed this out in his argument that there exist international *realities*, which implies other sources of creation that differ from the mainstream that Smith argues for, and which limit the possibilities for mainstream action. Relevant political action is taken against the actions of these unaccounted-for objects, meaning that the main guiding force for actors is not an 'underlying social force,' or some other theoretical construction taken from the works of mainstream IR theory. That is not to say that it is not *informed*, however weakly or strongly, by some IR theory, but IR theory, *pace* Smith, plays such a minor role as to be largely irrelevant. Something else is acted on in situations like these, and this something else's provenance is beyond the scope of Smith's argument. This points to the need of a more powerful causal argument to explain the international agents and this *other*, something that postmodernism pretends to offer, and fails.

The need of causal arguments is what leads us to the contradiction. I will start where my last argument left off, mainly, that postmodernism cannot account for events in

the world given the lack of causal arguments that it offers. At least two types of causation need to be accounted for: agent causation, and event causation. This is a distinction made by Chisholm, and is maintained by other philosophers such as Searle.[95] Agent causation is "when an *agent,* as distinguished from an event, causes an event or state of affairs," and event causation is "when one event or state of affairs causes some other event or state of affairs."[96] The difference between these is that while event causation always needs another event (or events), agent causation always originates from the agent and is explained by the agent's prior experience that certain actions will bring about certain events, or is at least highly likely to.[97] This is a neutral enough requirement of agent causation to allow for a host of applications, making this a useful conception for either side.[98] In addition, it contains a bare minimum for understanding event causation in that once a subject understands a particular self-caused causal relation, that understanding can be generalized and extended into events conceived more broadly.[99] Examples of this can range from the simple act of breaking a few windows and generalizing that that is what it takes to break glass, to more complicated acts, such as understanding acts of aggression and generalizing that in certain contexts these can lead to war.

Returning to Smith's argument, we can see that a crippling weakness is his inability to establish a convincing case for the sense that international agents, acting under the discursive control of mainstream IR theory, helped cause the event which was September 11. Discursive control, as argued for by Smith, would need to account for the

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[95] Roderick M. Chisholm, "Human Freedom and the Self," in *Free Will*, ed. Gary Watson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 28; John R. Searle, *Intentionality,* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 115.

[96] Chisholm uses different terms here. He calls agent causation "immanent," and event causation "transeunt," although his definitions are the same. In my discussion I will continue to use the terms agent causation and event causation. Chisholm, "Human Freedom and the Self," 28 (italics in original).

[97] Chisholm, "Human Freedom and the Self," 31.

[98] This is closer to Searle's conception of intentional causation. Chap 4.

[99] Searle's example of child breaking vase coming to understand causal connection of what makes vase break in general. Chap 4.

reality which forms the causal background required above i.e., it would have to explain how *all* the pertinent actors would *always have* acted according to mainstream reality. This discursive reality would then be perpetuated by entering into causal chains that would inevitably lead to events like September 11. To begin with, the presumption that discursive reality can stand in for "reality" is problematic, which will be demonstrated shortly. However, the argument for agent causation fails because there is no link between discursive control and international agents, i.e., there is no reason for it to be the case that because the mainstream maintains discursive control, international agents act the way they do. Likewise, because Smith's arguments only cover the limited case of the mainstream, he is unable to account for agent causation on the *other* side—except at one point when he suggests that hatred of the US motivated the attacks,[100] but that does not go too far in explaining anything. This is enough to show that agent causation is not *completely* absent from Smith's argument, but it is evident that he is unable to make a strong case for the mainstream's responsibility for September 11. The failure of discursive agential causation puts him in a precarious situation though, because he still seems to assume the reality of September 11, which leads us finally to the contradiction.

In assuming the reality of an event like September 11, Smith assumes causes. Causes are entities in the world that are largely independent of our attitudes toward them, i.e., they form a part of the philosophical realist conception of reality discussed earlier in this chapter.[101] Returning to Smith's argument, it is now worthwhile to point out why he remains quiet on the subject of event causation: *his account of reality cannot accommodate it*. As the previous paragraph and other parts of this section have tried to

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[100] Smith, "Singing Our World into Existence," 510.

[101] Searle, *Intentionality*, 130.

demonstrate, postmodernists like Smith tend to divert attention from event causation by stressing discursively controlled agential causation. To begin with, the thrust of their argument is to show how the mainstream—with its economic and political interests in mind—discursively creates and controls reality, thus subsuming event causation by determining what reality is. Then it stresses how agents, either wielding the power of the discourse or powerless under its control, cause events in the world. In this guise, a "mainstream" chain of events can be admitted, but only while framed in postmodernist discoursespeak. Since this framing fails though, the discoursespeak is stripped away from the causes, forcing an understanding of them in mainstream terms.

Since Smith still assumes September 11 then, as the foregoing discussion points out, he is forced from his postmodern perspective, to what Rescher calls an "extra-textual realm," in which it is understood that "the textual realm is *not* closed, because texts often as not concern themselves with the real world."[102] What Rescher wants to stress, and I would add my own voice to this, is that Smith's type of argument is weak because it can only account for a limited discursive practice, and therefore has limited causal control. If the postmodernist were challenged on her argument as I have done, it remains necessary for her to give further reasons for her argument, reasons which go beyond texts. However, in doing so would the very thing set out to deny is assumed. In other words, mere appeal to actual causes is an admittance of the inability of postmodernism to account for a good causal explanation that would make their argument of discursive reality valid. Providing the real reasons is a trap that would lead them into contradiction.

Furthermore, if the postmodernist rejects the above and still makes reference to

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[102] Nicholas Rescher, *Objectivity: The Obligations of Impersonal Reason* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 201.

reality, it is necessarily a realist conception of it. This is because they have not yet provided a sound argument of their own, and cannot, as we have just seen, without contradiction. So if they simply refer to a realist conception of reality, not giving arguments explaining events to avoid the implied contradiction, they do not give any arguments at all, meaning that they are defaulting back to the realist conception. This is what is meant by the double bind, in that when the postmodernist goes ahead and assumes a real event outside the sphere of her discursive control, she puts herself in a double bind. To be fair, the contradiction is not obvious, but emerges only after pointing out what I have said above. It only becomes apparent after showing the lack of causal arguments in postmodernist's conception of reality. Nevertheless, these arguments are necessary if the postmodernist wants to succeed in her attempts to explain reality through discourse, which was clearly Smith's intention. It is worth pointing out that causes, whether they are agent—or event—cause no similar harm to the mainstream position. In fact, it is assumed in the mainstream ontology that it is either agents or something larger that are responsible for causality, which exists as it is regardless of IR theorists. In this way, the mainstream position can accommodate causality better than postmodernism.

At this point it could be objected that because my argument is against a specific instance, that this contradiction does not apply to the (subversive) postmodern position as a whole. However, as the argument stands, it can be generalized to include all instances of where this argument is put forth. Postmodernists are anti-logocentrists. Anti-logocentrism is, according to Rorty, "a special case of anti-essentialism."[103] Anti-essentialism, as he explains elsewhere, is a view that has been in the background all along, mainly, that things exist not because of some intrinsic nature, but by their place in

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[103] Rorty, *Essays on Heidegger and Others,* 130.

some linguistic system. Rorty says,

> the anti-essentialist denies that there is a way to pick out an object from the rest of the
> universe *except* as the object of which a certain set of sentences are true…that means that
> there is no way of getting behind language to some more immediate nonlinguistic form of
> acquaintance with what we are talking about.[104]

On reflection, we can note that this position stands behind the definition of discursive objects, Derrida's anti-logocentrism, Foucault's discursive power, and Smith's September 11 argument. But is this a defensible argument? In the case of showing that Smith's version was not, it was sufficient enough to point out that he offered faulty causal support for his claims. A proper account would scare out, in a manner of speaking, the philosophical realism implied in his claims. So more generally, it was the offering of a specific challenge that reveals the limits of metaphysical possibility for postmodernism. In that case it was successful, and I will now apply the challenge to the more general position of anti-essentialism, which underlies postmodernism.

This argument is an adaptation of Boghossian's argument against anti-essentialist fact constructivism (expressed by the definition of discursive reality used throughout this chapter).[105] Boghossian's argument grants fact constructivism, with all the metaphysical implications. From this it follows that, given any fact P, P may be created by one discourse, while not-P may be created by another discourse.[106] His argument is then,

1. Since discourse 1 creates fact P, P.

2. And since it is possible that discourse 2 should have created the fact that not-P, then

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[104] Rorty, *Philosophy and Social Hope,* 56-7.
[105] Boghossian, *Fear of Knowledge,* 39-41.
[106] I am here following Boghossian's use of 'fact,' and I recognize that the argument for anti-essentialism directly above talks about objects instead of facts. However, in line with the definition of fact that I am using, facts may simply be objects. It also has a broader application in referring to states of affairs. So I do not think there is any danger if I continue to use Boghossian's original terms. Boghossian, *Fear of Knowledge*, 40.

possibly not-P.

3. So: It is possible that both P and not-P.[107]

However, the argument as it stands violates the law of non-contradictions, which is "Necessarily: It is not the case both that P and that not-P."[108] Contradiction, in this use, is meant in a more formal logical and metaphysical sense, rather than the informal, argumentative sense used above.[109] The problem, then, with the possibility of creating the fact P and not-P, is "how we are to accommodate the possible simultaneous construction of logically (or metaphysically) incompatible facts."[110] For example, as Boghossian asks, "how could it be the case both that the world is flat…*and* that it is round…?"[111] Boghossian's argument is the challenge that scares the philosophical realism out of anti-essentialism because in every case where we find a discourse-creating argument that denies our normal understanding of a fact, *we are forced to look beyond discourse for an explanation of that fact that is non-contradicting*. In a fundamental way this challenges the anti-essentialist position that supports postmodernism because it reveals to us that discourse, construction, dependence, etc., may serve as possible explanations for attitudes towards certain facts, but not that those are the facts themselves. For some facts, there is no control to be exerted by discourse. In other words, anti-essentialism's limits are reached, and *pace* Rorty we can get behind language into a world of independent facts.

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[107] Boghossian, *Fear of Knowledge*, 40.

[108] Boghossian, *Fear of Knowledge*, 40.

[109] The metaphysical and logical weight of this law have, with minor exceptions, been unchallenged since Aristotle's definition of it in his *Metaphysics,* "It is impossible that the same thing can at the same time both belong and not belong to the same object and in the same respect, and all other specifications that might be made, let them be added to meet local objections," (1005b19-23). Cited by Laurence R. Horn, "Contradiction," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2006 Edition)*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2006/entries/contradiction/ (accessed July 3, 2008).

[110] Boghossian, *Fear of Knowledge*, 41.

[111] Boghossian, *Fear of Knowledge*, 40 [original emphasis].

5. Conclusions

Up to this point we have seen some important developments. We saw a more defined statement of the ontological objects of each competing epistemological position, and the metaphysical position taken on these objects. We also saw a more detailed statement of the postmodern challenge to reality. Yet the most important development was the argument showing that the postmodernist position of discourse creating reality implies contradictions. I will now go into more detail of this importance, in terms of its relation to my hypothesis, and concerning how this will affect the arguments to come that deal with epistemology.

My main hypothesis is that postmodernism is the weaker choice as a competing epistemological position because its own principles imply self-contradictions. Sub-hypothesis one, which deals with the metaphysical background, was that postmodernism relies upon a mainstream conception of reality, when it specifically denies this, which creates a contradiction. This sub-hypothesis has been defended in this chapter for the main reason that postmodernists refer to reality without accounting for causal relations that would make this reality possible under their own terms, and in failing this, end up referring to a mainstream version of reality. In a more general application, this argument also holds against anti-essentialism, which is the background position of postmodernism, showing that overall the postmodernist metaphysical position is hard to defend. I believe these conclusions are good in the relation of sub-hypothesis one, sustaining that part of my overall hypothesis.

In relation to the rest of the hypotheses this leaves us with sub-hypotheses two and

three, which deal with epistemology. So, I will now discuss how the contradiction argued for here will affect the discussion that follows in the next chapters. One of the main implications is that both competing epistemological positions now compete on even ground, which is to say that we are all in the same reality, no different worlds, and that everything is going to be taken to be about the world "out there." As I mentioned in the introduction, a major problem for the epistemological positions was that many postmodernists opposed rational discussion, and any resolution of issues was doomed to failure. But since I have shown that the grounds on which that opposition were invalid, we can safely move forward into epistemological discussions. Most importantly, though, we can already see the weakening of the postmodernist challenge to mainstream epistemology. The main point of the challenge is to point out the inherent power dimension in any given knowledge domain, that comes from the development of a method that has its origins in power. This rests firmly on the type of argument developed in discourse-created reality, in that the same sort of power control development argument is used. This argument, though, was shown to leave reality untouched: i.e., give no strong reasons for us to drop our common views on reality. Since my main argument against postmodernist epistemology is that it challenges mainstream epistemology on broader social grounds without getting at its cognitive bases, we can already get a good sense of the direction of the argument. It will be noticed, however, that this does not completely discredit the motivation of the postmodernists' argument, the politics of inclusion, which leaves open the possibility to explore their directions without accepting all of their conclusions. We shall now move on to this task.