

Chapter Three: Normative Arguments in Epistemology

This chapter has two main objectives. The first is to offer an account of the normativity of justification for both the mainstream and the postmodernist position. The second is to argue that postmodernist epistemology is normative in the sense that it has similar normative properties as mainstream epistemology, and as such contradicts itself because it then becomes a “dominating” epistemology. It is further argued here that there is another contradiction in that although postmodernism denies deductive reasoning, it uses it to arrive at its own conclusions about knowledge. The second objective is important to this thesis in different ways. First, both contradictions support the broad objective of showing that postmodernists, despite their denial of mainstream assumptions, end up relying on them. Second, the epistemological contradiction supports sub-hypothesis three: that the normative elements in the postmodern position mirror those of the mainstream one, resulting in a self-contradiction. Finally, with this in place, the arguments supporting this thesis’s main hypothesis, that the postmodernist competing epistemological position implies self-contradictions, will have been completed. This will complete the third part of a three-part argument.

Section one establishes the importance of normative epistemological arguments for mainstream IR theory, followed by a more detailed philosophical account of normativity, based on the concepts of supervenience and knowledge. Knowledge is the guiding principle and supervenience becomes relevant when certain actions (the epistemic principles) lead to it better than others. Section two establishes that a similar argument exists within the postmodernist position, namely, in the politics of inclusion

and discourse analysis. The assumptions of the politics of inclusion ascribe certain methods for knowledge and reject others, which can be formulated into a basic argument displaying normative properties similar to the mainstream one. Section three then takes a closer look at the concept of supervenience and postmodernism, pointing out that their position is similar to the mainstream's in that it "dominates" other epistemologies. This is pointed out as a contradiction, because postmodernists deny mainstream epistemology for that reason. Furthermore, the deductive reasoning used by postmodernists in their normative arguments contradicts their previous denial of it. Finally, in the conclusion to this chapter the importance of these contradictions is discussed.

1. Normativity and the Mainstream

Although the mainstream normative position is not vigorously defended, there exists enough consensus to characterize it as a consistent position. Before getting into its details, a little background may be helpful. It will be remembered from chapter one that the mainstream epistemological position begins by assuming that there is a reality that exists, and that existence gives us the basis of truth for all our statements, theories, etc. of it. Chapter two argued that we come into contact with this reality by means of cognitive functioning, which was narrowed down to experience or observation, to which we have first-person access. Through further properties, viz. the conversion of this access into propositional content, this serves as a justification for basic foundational beliefs, and justification is passed along to more complicated non-foundational beliefs by way of deductive reasoning. In this chapter, the argument takes a normative turn, in that the mainstream is no longer describing its epistemology, but rather saying that that is how

knowledge should be judged. In other words, the position is that given the alternatives (e.g. postmodernism (among others)), empiricist epistemological criteria are the best to give us knowledge of reality.

At first glance, this normative argument just seems to be an attitude that usually accompanies talk of epistemology: that in discussing ways of justifying knowledge of reality, there are some ways that are better than others, and there is value in choosing the better ones over the others. The third debate, especially in regards to knowledge, rests on this attitude.¹ However, a closer look shows us that there is more involved in choosing one epistemological justification over another than mere attitude. Recall Morgenthau, who 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.²

Morgenthau appeals here to facts about epistemological criteria. His argument for choosing one method of justification over another is based on the properties of the criteria themselves rather than moving primarily on attitude. So what seemed like attitude, then, is really a normative argument—one that works from the properties of the epistemological criteria, is shared by several mainstream authors, and is akin to

¹ In dramatic terms, Jarvis characterizes this as “a battle for the right to adjudicate between legitimate and illegitimate knowledge, between what the research programs of International Relations should be as opposed to what in practice they are.... Knowledge is power, postmodernists rightly insist, and the right to control and sanction it is a price eagerly pursued.” D. S. L. Jarvis, *International Relations and the Challenge of Postmodernism: Defending the Discipline* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2000), 178-9.

² Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations*, 4.

arguments for the normative nature of epistemology.³ I now show how mainstream authors argue for this normativity before I turn to similar arguments in epistemology.

Kal Holsti's, observation serves as a general motivation for this thesis, If we keep our eyes on what is actually happening in the world and on the requirements of reliable knowledge, we may be able to avoid the dangers of the replacement syndrome, faddism, and extreme theoretical and methodological relativism—that is, of an intellectual life without standards.⁴

Like Morgenthau, Holsti is obviously concerned with epistemological criteria, elsewhere specified as adhering to empiricism.⁵ He accepts these criteria, and believes that they are a firm basis for justification of what he calls 'reliable knowledge'. Next, he opposes this type of justification against relevant alternatives, which in the context of the quotation include postmodernism. But the most important element of his argument is where he states, "to avoid the dangers...of an intellectual life without standards." This is important because he indicates the recognition of the mainstream normative position, i.e., Holsti believes there is something that the empiricist epistemology has that other epistemologies do not, and that one should abide by empiricism and avoid the alternatives. This fits the twofold requirement of my argument, that Holsti recognizes the factual criteria of empiricism and judges the superiority on this criteria.

The next author, John Vasquez, presents an even stronger recognition of the mainstream normative position. Vasquez begins by stating his support of empiricism, because it embodies rules that "are applied to make appraisals in a rigorous manner that limits the intrusion of personal preferences," turning enquiry into a "self-correcting

³ See Jaegwon Kim, "What is 'Naturalized Epistemology'?" 382-3.

⁴ K. J. Holsti, "Mirror, Mirror on the Wall," 261.

⁵ K. J. Holsti, "Mirror, Mirror on the Wall," 261.

mechanism” with an “ability to settle differences on empirical questions.”⁶ He then links this to an objective theory of truth, arguing that the empiricism is the best way towards this ideal, saying,

Truth is not simply a semantic concept, but a value that guides enquiry. To say that truth is the primal value means that theories and beliefs should be accepted or rejected solely on the basis of their ability to be consistent with the evidence.... Science insists that for empirical questions its value commitments to search for truth must be taken as guiding, and its practices privileged as the best way of attaining knowledge.⁷

Vasquez’s position here touches on all the points of my characterization of the mainstream position. He accepts the basic idea of truth being a concept that reality grants upon beliefs. He distinguishes the factual properties of empiricist justification that contribute toward that basic idea, and contrasts them with other forms of justification. And he makes a judgment on that justification, claiming it to be the best given its aims. As in the earlier case, the normative aspect comes only after the consideration of these facts.

This does seem to be enough to show that normativity rests on more than just attitude and opinion. These authors have shown us rather that the argument is pushed by considering what it is about mainstream justification that puts us in a ‘better’ position, epistemologically speaking. Furthermore, it appears that the mainstream is unified on this point.⁸ While this may be useful in spelling out the mainstream’s position on normativity, it does not answer questions like how normativity arises in the first place, or what properties a criteria must have. Neither of these questions is considered by the

⁶ Vasquez, “The Post-Positivist Debate,” 228.

⁷ Vasquez, “The Post-Positivist Debate,” 228-9.

⁸ It should be pointed out that both Holsti and Vasquez’s arguments are taken from mainstream defenses within the context of the third debate.

mainstream position, but that is no reason to deny that the position is normative. Within the limited range of things considered, for whatever reason, the simple criteria required by these authors is adequate to say what passes or not. But to get deeper into the normative issue, a different, more general, argument is required. For this I will now turn to a similar discussion from contemporary epistemology.

The question whether epistemology is normative is prevalent in contemporary epistemology.⁹ Because research on the question often leads to areas of little interest to me here, I will focus on formulating a basic argument for normativity that fits with the cruder form seen above, but that also adds details where that one was lacking. To begin with, then, an epistemic goal must be specified. This is understood as true belief or knowledge.¹⁰ The important questions now do not deal with knowledge so much as they do with justification, focusing on the conditions of belief and which beliefs we can accept. These combine to form a basis for criteria of justified belief, but it also imposes the requirement that we define these criteria without using epistemic terms, in order to avoid circularity.¹¹ Kim, for example, argues, “*the criteria of justified belief must be formulated on the basis of descriptive or naturalistic terms alone, without the use of any evaluative or normative ones, whether epistemic or of another kind.*”¹² Kim’s comment reveals another reason which points us to a deeper issue: in determining the criteria based on their descriptive properties we subsequently give them epistemic properties (e.g., being justified, being a good reason, etc.) and these are “terms [that] are themselves

⁹ John Greco, “Virtue Epistemology,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Winter 2004 Edition)*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2004/entries/epistemology-virtue/> (accessed July 3, 2008); Alvin I. Goldman, *Pathways to Knowledge: Private and Public*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 51-70.

¹⁰ Alvin I. Goldman, *Knowledge in a Social World*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 5.

¹¹ Kim, “What is ‘Naturalized Epistemology?’” 381-2.

¹² Kim, “What is ‘Naturalized Epistemology?’” 382.

essentially normative.”¹³ This means that in specifying justification there is something else going on, which is the creation of epistemic permissibility and responsibility, which are normative concepts.

The plausibility of this argument rests on the specification of epistemic terms. Epistemic terms, in turn, rest their plausibility on the conditions of belief. In respect to these conditions, we have a good idea of at least three conditions, based on the type of foundationalism presented in chapter two: being believed, being caused in a certain way (belief generation) and being in a deductive logical relation to other beliefs (belief transmission).¹⁴ Each of these is non-epistemic yet they are the essential elements of a typical form of epistemological justification.¹⁵ It is then argued that the reason they are epistemic is because epistemic properties *supervene* upon the natural ones. Supervenience is a philosophical concept that is best defined as “[a] set of properties *A* supervenes upon another set *B* just in case no two things can differ with respect to *A*-properties without also differing with respect to their *B*-properties.”¹⁶ This concept is used often in moral philosophy to explain normative ethics, i.e., which actions are justified from a moral point of view,¹⁷ but it is seen in several other branches of philosophy.¹⁸ It is relevant to epistemological justification in the way Sosa points out that “for every case of a justified belief, its being justified is supervenient on a set of non-epistemic facts involving only the basis property of the recursion and its generating

¹³ Kim, “What is ‘Naturalized Epistemology’?” 382.

¹⁴ These conditions may vary based on the type of justification under consideration. James Van Cleve, “Epistemic Supervenience Revisited,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 59, no. 4 (December 1999): 1049.

¹⁵ These are non-epistemic in the following way: belief is a mental state, observation and experience are cognitive functions, and deduction is a logical function.

¹⁶ Brian McLaughlin and Karen Bennett, “Supervenience,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2006 Edition)*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2006/entries/supervenience/> (accessed July 3, 2008).

¹⁷ Kim, “What is ‘Naturalized Epistemology’?” 383.

¹⁸ McLaughlin and Bennett, “Supervenience.”

relation.”¹⁹ In other words, the epistemological character assumed throughout this thesis refers primarily to this non-epistemic element.

With this in place it is now possible to start discussing two levels of normativity. The first refers to what I will call the epistemological level. Kim characterizes this as, “if a belief is justified for us, then it is *permissible* and *reasonable*, from the epistemic point of view, for us to hold it, and it would be *epistemically irresponsible* to hold beliefs that contradict it.”²⁰ This argument produces normative force because, as Kim rightly points out, belief and justification are mental actions, so in acting in this special epistemological way, we are doing the “right” thing.

Yet this argument does not seem to have the force implied in the work of the IR theorists in my earlier examples. They seemed to appealing to a more general sense of right and wrong, which I originally suggested to be some sort of attitude. This is the second level of normativity, to which the epistemological level provides the basis. Returning to Kim’s discussion, he points out that due to the above considerations, there is a good reason to parallel it with normative ethics. The business of normative ethics, he explains, is “to delineate the conditions under which acts and decisions are justified from the moral point of view.”²¹ This basic argument has been taken over by a number of so-called virtue epistemologists, whose founding assumption is that epistemology is normative in just this way.²² I believe this explains why adherents to a particular

¹⁹ Ernest Sosa, “The Foundations of Foundationalism,” *Noûs* 14, no. 4 (Nov. 1980): 551.

²⁰ Kim, “What is ‘Naturalized Epistemology?’” 383.

²¹ Kim, “What is ‘Naturalized Epistemology?’” 383.

²² Greco sums this position up nicely when he says, “just as virtue theories in ethics try to understand the normative properties of actions in terms of the normative properties of moral agents, virtue epistemology tries to understand the normative properties of beliefs in terms of the normative properties of cognitive agents.” Greco, “Virtue Epistemology.”

epistemological justification will attach to it this moral importance, but there is a problem in my argument so far that needs clarification.

If epistemology is normative, and it derives the plausibility of this argument from the consideration of non-epistemic criteria, these criteria are necessarily not limited only to the ones I have listed. The reason for that is because if the supervenience of epistemic terms were limited only to these ones, it would be a very bad argument. Rather, as Sosa points out,

[i]t should be noted that...foundationalism does not entail a doctrine of objectively unique foundations for empirical knowledge. For there might be several alternative recursive specifications of the class of justified beliefs, making use of different bases and generators, without any evident criterion for selecting one as objectively correct.²³

Such a view might seem to embrace relativism, because as it stands, if supervenience does not require a unique foundation, that implies a possibly slippery slope where anything can stand in for justification. However, this possibility is reigned in by the fact that supervenience occurs where the justification is guided towards a specific epistemic goal, for instance, a justified belief (or knowledge). This goal quickly limits the consideration of non-truth-conducive methods of justification. Indeed, it could be added that the discussions of Kim and Sosa presuppose that the only methods under consideration have these goals in mind. So in accepting this argument, one does not necessarily accept relativism. But, there is one possibility Kim and Sosa's argument does not conceive that may in fact imply some sort of relativism.

As I have shown, supervenience occurs within a framework guided by an epistemic goal. But the concept of epistemic goal is not accounted for as tightly as

²³ Sosa, "The Foundations of Foundationalism," 552.

supervenience is. That is not to say that it is not well defined. As I have explained, and as is obvious in the literature, this goal is knowledge, and this goes unchallenged. Also it is this epistemic goal that reins in the possible methods of justification that go under it. Yet a question that is left hanging is: what if the epistemic goal was different? What if, instead of knowledge, the goal was slightly justified belief? As I understand supervenience, this would only imply that the justificational requirements be loosened significantly. But more interestingly, what if the epistemic goal were replaced with an opposed epistemic goal viz., power/knowledge? As far as the argument goes, the only requirement seems to be that the epistemic goal be, in some way, epistemic. While this goal is usually occupied by a mainstream concept, there is no reason why it should be necessarily restricted to this. After all, the more important part is how the justification is related to that goal. This leaves open the possibility of replacing the traditional epistemic goal with a postmodern one, which I will discuss in a moment. This also opens a worrying possibility: relativism.

Relativism, as I understand it, is opposed to the objectivism that I have defended. A widely accepted account of this kind of relativism is Thomas Nagel's view that,

it is often generalized into an interpretation of most deep disagreements of belief or method as due to different frames of reference, forms of thought or practice, or forms of life, between which there is no objective way of judging but only a contest for power.²⁴

Allowing the inter-changeability of epistemic goals would certainly lead us into the territory of relativism. In fact, it seems to be the most basic expression of it. But am I being a relativist here? Very definitely not. There *are* more or less objective ways of judging methods, or epistemologies, etc. Chapter two, in my opinion, offers a very

²⁴ Thomas Nagel, *The Last Word* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 4..

reasonable case for showing how one can judge between two methods. The form of the argument I am pursuing *looks like* relativism, but the inherent fear of relativism may be laid to rest once and for all. If the general objective of this thesis succeeds, this is all the reason I need for saying so.

2. Normativity and Postmodernism

It is unsurprising that postmodernism should have a strong normative element to it. The recognition of the workings of power is the first step in every instance. We only need to be reminded of one of the main arguments offered by George that mainstream epistemology has

often brutally, invoked its strategies of control, its discipline, its unified frame of reference about the good life, its singular reality, its insistence on sovereignty...It is in this quest—to impose a singular, foundational reality upon miscreants and unbelievers—that the post-Enlightenment “will to knowledge” has quite literally become the “will to power.”²⁵

Similarly, Richard Ashley points out that knowledge creation creates “a place where the unruly can be reliably named and tamed, and the person of unquestioning faith in the word can be secure.”²⁶ The response to this is to dissent to such practices by turning power against itself in hopes of opening new spaces for the varied groups who are oppressed by the mainstream. In terms of knowledge this typically means showing how discourse has been used to create what Smith calls disciplining methods. In this context, his comment is meant to point out the way these mainstream methods and their adherents

²⁵ Jim George, *Discourses of Global Politics: A Critical (Re)Introduction to International Relations* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1994), 31.

²⁶ Richard Ashley, “The Achievements of Post-Structuralism,” in *International Theory: Positivism and Beyond*, eds. Steve Smith, Ken Booth, and Marysia Zalewski (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 253.

discipline non-traditional methods of knowing. Based on what we saw in section one, this may not be too far off. This observation points us towards a way to characterize postmodernist normativity.

The first step, as I indicated in previously, would be to establish an “epistemic goal” for the postmodernist position, which I could safely say would be power/knowledge. Recall that the main idea behind power/knowledge is that knowledge is not reached by any cognitive means, but rather is created then controlled by certain discourses.²⁷ This, of course, runs counter to traditional arguments for the normativity of epistemology, but it must be remembered that the most important point is not so much the epistemic goal, but rather the consistency of the criteria that lead one to that goal.

However, pinpointing these criteria seems troublesome. To begin with, postmodernism eschews (in theory) any common terminology with contemporary epistemology. Furthermore, not even common terms could overcome the gulf between the cognitive base of contemporary epistemology and the non-cognitive base of postmodernism. But these problems are only superficial. It will be recalled from Kim’s and Sosa’s argument that the conditions be non-epistemic, meaning that *a priori* postmodernist methods meet the requirements. In fact, the main restraint is the argument is developed in a non-circular manner. So since we are dealing with an alternative epistemic goal, it follows that alternative methods will be used. As such, the normative terms that supervene upon them will not be epistemological as discussed above, but rather epistemological within the framework under consideration. Nevertheless, as we will see, a normative argument is plausibly constructed from the criteria of

²⁷ Michel Foucault, “The Body of the Condemned,” in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 175.

power/knowledge.

The first criterion is the observation that there is a discrepancy between reality (however that is defined) and theory, in that the latter is not properly representing the former, due to the social forces in control. This has been identified as the politics of inclusion, and is the starting point for such representative postmodern authors such as Smith, George, Ashley, and Der Derian, as has been demonstrated throughout this thesis.

An uncontroversial definition of the politics of inclusion would be Jarvis's, who says,

[t]otalizing metanarratives conferring ontological centrality on certain key groups...have been abandoned in recognition of the proliferation of social movements that now constitute the spectrum of left politics (feminists, ethnic and religious minorities, sexual minorities, ecological activists, human rights activists, the disabled, etc.).²⁸

As this definition makes clear, the observation is meant to report on the relation between theory and reality at a given point in time, and as such is not defined in terms of power/knowledge.²⁹ Rather, this observation serves as the motivating factor to look deeper into this situation in order to identify the sources of 'totalizing metanarratives' (conceived here as discursive control). Understood in this way, this first criterion is much like belief generation, at least in terms of its basic property of 'belief caused in such-and-such a way.' This first criterion, much like a belief being caused by experience on the empiricists' view, is at the start of any power/knowledge argument.

The second criterion that follows is the interrogation of the situation where the source of the discourse is identified. This is akin to Foucault's genealogical approach,

²⁸ Jarvis, *International Relations and the Challenge of Postmodernism*, 75.

²⁹ It is important to mention that it is unrelated to power/knowledge necessarily because this is the unexamined empirical premise that is responsible for self-contradiction within the postmodern epistemological justification, which was discussed in chapter two. I am retaining it because it is central to the postmodernists arguments, and because I am still maintaining that their position implies contradictions.

articulated by Smith, who argues that discourses embody social power, compete with other discourses, and then dominate based on the greater power. These dominations are what, within a particular area (e.g. IR theory), become the “givens.”³⁰ This is what I have been calling discourse analysis throughout this thesis, the point of which is “to explain how power is constituted and how its premises and givens are replicated at all levels of society and to reveal its exclusionary practices in order to create space for critical thought and action.”³¹ For the moment I would like to postpone discussion on the creation of spaces, and focus more on the properties of discourse analysis. Again, this criterion is understood more as an observation about a larger social reality, and seems to comment more on this than on discourse. Smith’s argument from chapter one supports this claim, in that because it is an *observation* about reality means that this criterion is also not defined in terms of power/knowledge. Yet, like the first criterion, it leads one to the conclusion of power/knowledge. The reason for this is that it forces upon one a deeper understanding of the underlying power structure, compelling her to look not only how this is represented, but also how this *underrepresents* subjects within a particular area. Speaking of this under-representation as the elimination of voices, Smith comments that “silences are the loudest voices.”³² This second criterion allows the inference of power/knowledge because it allows one to see how power has silenced any particular voice. For this reason I consider this criterion as having the property of being a belief transmitter. I will now argue that taken together, these criteria join to make a normative argument.

³⁰ Steve Smith, “The Self-Images of a Discipline: A Genealogy of International Relations Theory,” in *International Relations Theory Today*, eds. Ken Booth and Steve Smith (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 4.

³¹ George, *Discourses of Global Politics*, 30.

³² Smith, “The Self-Images of a Discipline,” 2.

In the first place, I have tried to demonstrate how the power/knowledge argument meets the technical requirements of the argument for normativity presented in section one. These are: first, criteria not defined in terms of the epistemic goal; second, non-epistemic or non-evaluative criteria; and finally, an inferential relation between epistemic goal and criteria. Though my description has been crude, I believe at least the technical requirements have been met. From this it is possible to infer that there is supervenience in regard to power/knowledge justification, and from that it follows that there is a normative aspect to the postmodern power/knowledge argument. The question then becomes how this is expressed in the IR literature?

The main concern, as mentioned above, is the opening of spaces, or expressed another way, allowing voices to be heard. The force of power/knowledge is to show how they got to be that way, then points us in the opposite direction. Like the mainstream, the most obvious remedy is to reject any justification that does not have the same criteria. George states such a position as a “politics of dissent,” which “seeks to disrupt and erode the theory and practice of these power regimes.”³³ Smith dismisses all the assumptions of mainstream epistemology, as was demonstrated in chapter two. Similarly, disheartened by mainstream hegemony, Ashley supports a post-structuralist intervention, including “the innovation and elaboration of deconstructive...and other ‘methods’ that, though problematising the very notion of methodology, nevertheless enable an engaged, rigorous, criticism-conscious exploration of events and activities at once imposing and transgressing limits of social possibility.”³⁴ This view resembles other postmodernists who welcome theory with the same epistemological and metaphysical affinities. George,

³³ George, *Discourses of Global Politics*, 158.

³⁴ Ashley, “The Achievement of Post-Structuralism,” 246, 249.

for example, sees postmodernism and critical theory to in enough agreement as to “take seriously the questions raised in the conversation *between* Critical Theory and postmodernism.”³⁵ This lends support to the normative argument that postmodernists, like the mainstream, make judgments about what sort of justification is correct or not. These judgments are based on similarities or dissimilarities of the criteria on which justification is based.

3. Contradictions

When the normative argument of postmodernism is articulated, it becomes clear that it follows the same reasoning that lies behind the mainstream one, and commands the same force. This means that after rejecting the normativity implied by the mainstream position, it admits it again but with different criteria. That is to say, while postmodernism may have different epistemic criteria, it has the same normative force, which is the main point in their rejecting mainstream epistemology. Here is the argument in greater detail.

In order get discussion started, I will bring up and argue against a possible objection: since postmodernism and the mainstream have different epistemic standards and the postmodernists reject the mainstream ones, my saying that they admit the same ones is inconsistent. This would be a sound objection if it was true, but that is not what I am arguing. For what follows, the details of the specific criteria are mostly unimportant. That is, it does not matter if it is observation or the uncovering a discursive omission that we count something as knowledge; it is the property of each condition, i.e., what it says in relation to the fundamental epistemic goal. On this view, whether or not a condition is exactly equivalent is unimportant; its property is what is under consideration.

³⁵ George, *Discourses of Global Politics*, 164.

Understood this way, the objection above does not apply.

In responding to that objection, this thesis has relied on an important concept, supervenience, to explain the normative aspect of epistemology in that normative properties supervene on non-epistemic ones. Once non-epistemic properties are accounted for within justification, they take on a further status: that of being epistemological. One is epistemologically in the right by doing certain actions, or the contrary, so this is taken as being an argument of what one should do in terms of satisfying some given epistemic goal. However, because there is no reason to suppose that the epistemic goal *cannot* be interchanged, I have argued that the most important point in a supervenience argument is that the particular non-epistemic criteria that make up justification be directed *at* that epistemic goal, however it is defined. That reinforces the importance of justification seen in contemporary discussions of this concept, but explores a possibility that they do not. And in exploring that possibility while respecting the requirements, I have demonstrated that postmodernism's normative argument is similar to the mainstream's.

With this concept in place, it will be remembered from the mainstream position that given the epistemic goal of true belief of knowledge, an empiricist justification was seen as the standard by which knowledge should be judged. Other types of justifications, i.e., the non-cognitive power/knowledge argument, were seen as invalid. Adhering to one or another of these alternatives would be seen as acting irresponsibly. On the other hand, postmodernism replies by saying that whatever is accepted as a standard within a discipline is whatever it is because it has a certain dominating property that overpowers other possibilities. It is in this way, this play of interests and power, that knowledge is

formed. To show this, one needs to examine the silenced or marginalized groups within a given time-space frame to enumerate the ways discursive practices have been imposed. Once these impositions have been pointed out, they can be rejected or protested in order to create discursive space. Specifically within IR theory, this means that whatever does not follow a discourse analytic method or something akin to it must be rejected as being part of a totalizing practice.

It now becomes clear that formulated in this way, the postmodernist argument is similar to the mainstream one. Both are defined by an epistemic goal, and both rely on non-epistemic properties to reach these goals. Because of the properties of these steps, a normative quality is attached to them by the concept of supervenience. This supervenience makes it so that only a given number of epistemic steps are allowed and anything falling outside of that range earns reproach. Seen in this light, two contradictions can be pointed out.

The first one has to do with the normative epistemic element of the postmodern challenge. If the postmodern position is assumed, it soon becomes obvious that it prescribes the same attitudes towards other methods as the (former) mainstream one. That is to say, given the normative element inherent in the position, certain criteria are acceptable while others are excluded. It immediately becomes apparent that the postmodernists are following a process they have just rejected. How can this be? If the postmodern position takes the place of the mainstream, it can be assumed that it becomes the dominant voice. The argument *it* offered against the mainstream now becomes applicable to *itself*, i.e., postmodernism determines what is knowledge, what method is the best, etc., and all the discursive background now applies to it.

To this an important objection could be that, because those arguments were shown inadequate to refute dominance, postmodernism is not refuted. This would mean that, like the mainstream, the postmodern challenge to justification does not invalidate that justification. However, this also has the consequence that if postmodernism goes unchallenged, its position at the top is strengthened, meaning that the contradiction is only made stronger. If it is unchallenged, then the exclusionary implications are increased, meaning that postmodernist epistemology is that much more established, and other views (e.g., mainstream), are suppressed. And that is the starting point of the postmodern challenge to mainstream epistemology in the first place. The contradiction lies in the fact that the disciplinary elements it attributes to the mainstream are just as attributable to itself in the end.

The second contradiction is more general in nature, and lies in the fact that postmodernism cannot escape the reasoning inherent in the mainstream. In chapter one I argued that subversive postmodernism, the kind relevant to my discussion, seeks to deconstruct the logic assumed valid by any sort of modern scholarship. In chapter two I showed a specific case of this, in that the deductive logic used in empiricist justification was exposed as a discursive creation, and, like other mainstream assumptions, was just a construction. Now, what I want to argue is that the arguments inherent in the normative aspect of its epistemology demonstrate this sort of logic, and indeed, rest on it to gain strength. As I see it, this argument rests on the type of inference called *modus ponens*.

The logical form of this argument is:

If a claim A has properties x & y & etc.³⁶ then it is power/knowledge

³⁶ Here I am using the “&” as a conjunction. In logic “a conjunction is true just in case all the statements whereof it is a conjunction are individually true.” This means that, in setting x, y, etc. as properties I am assuming a rigid form in

Claim A has properties x & y & etc.

Claim A is power/knowledge

Postmodernism demonstrates this type of reasoning in the following way. In arguing for power/knowledge, a basic formulation of their argument is,

If Waltz's theory perpetuates the current international system and is backed by empiricist epistemology, then it is power/knowledge.

Waltz's theory perpetuates the current international system and is backed by an empiricist epistemology.

Waltz's theory is power/knowledge.

While this may leave out nuances and elaborations, it captures the basic form that postmodernists use to identify instances of power/knowledge. Brief reflection on section two of this chapter seems to confirm this.

That postmodernism implicitly relies on deductive reasoning has been pointed out by other authors.³⁷ Kate Manzo observes that,

[e]ven the most radically critical discourse easily slips into the form, the logic, and the implicit postulations of precisely what it seeks to contest, for it can never step completely outside of a heritage from which it must borrow its tools—its history, its language—in an attempt to destroy that heritage itself.³⁸

This observation, coupled with my own, appears to lead to another point where postmodernists contradict themselves by denying mainstream assumptions and then using them (even if unconsciously) in their arguments against the mainstream.

accordance with the properties of power/knowledge already elaborated upon. This just means that once these properties are defined they become rigid. Willard Van Orman Quine, *Elementary Logic*, Rev. ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), 9.

³⁷ Jarvis, *International Relations and the Challenge of Postmodernism: Defending the Discipline*, 56.

³⁸ Kate Manzo, "Modernist Discourse and the Crisis of a Development Theory," *Studies in Comparative International Development* 26 (Summer 1991): 8.

The inescapability of logic is also noted by Nagel, who says argues that no matter how different social groups may be, no matter how distant one culture is from another, etc., this has no effect whatsoever on the basic tenets of logic. He says, “none of these empirical thoughts enable us to rise *above* the logical thought, thinking about it while withholding commitment from its content.”³⁹ This also seems to protect my position from relativity in the sense that there exists at least one method to judge any given framework: accepting or rejecting it based on its logical consistency. In the present case it will be recalled that I am arguing against postmodernism based upon the fact that it assumes not- x and x (x being a specific assumption from the mainstream), something identified by informal logic as a self-contradiction. If this is accepted, strong relativism is ruled out. There are cases of weak relativism that would be allowable within the position I am defending, but the details here will have to wait for another thesis.⁴⁰

4. Conclusions

These two contradictions are enough to show two further weaknesses in the postmodern challenge by demonstrating that even though postmodernists deny mainstream assumptions, they implicitly rely on them in their own arguments. I will now explain how these are important to my main hypothesis, as well as the general argument that underlies the entire thesis.

In terms of the hypothesis, I have now set out and defended sub-hypothesis three, which is that the normative elements in the postmodern position mirror those of the

³⁹ Nagel, *The Last Word*, 59.

⁴⁰ The type of relativism referred to here is relative to evidence, i.e., if I have more evidence to support an argument than my neighbor whether the argument is good or not depends for each person on his or her evidence. This is not threatening to objectivism because objectivism is presupposed. Richard Feldman, “Good Arguments,” *Socializing Epistemology: The Social Dimensions of Knowledge*, ed. Frederick F. Schmitt (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1994), 182-3.

mainstream one, resulting in a self-contradiction. I did so by showing how the normative status of the mainstream position is obtained when normativity supervenes upon non-epistemic properties. It was demonstrated that the same properties and normativity are evident in the postmodernist position, meaning that it exhibits the same “disciplining” behavior that it attributes to the mainstream. Seen in this way, postmodernists become just as guilty as the mainstream. With sub-hypothesis three supported in this way, the main hypothesis of the thesis, that the postmodernist competing epistemological position implies self-contradictions, has been supported by three strong arguments. This has importance for IR theory, which will be dealt with in detail in the conclusion of the thesis.

In addition to the first contradiction supporting sub-hypothesis three and the main hypothesis, it supports the general argument of this thesis, which is that despite postmodernists’ denial of mainstream assumptions, they end up relying on them in their own arguments. However, this is supported in greater measure by the second contradiction I pointed out. The second contradiction showed that despite postmodernism’s outright rejection of the deductive reasoning used by the mainstream, its arguments displayed the same reasoning. Postmodernism simply cannot operate without the logic that underlies the mainstream. This strengthens the general argument more than the specific cases of contradictions, because each of the contradictions pointed out throughout the thesis are unique instance in a rather narrow context. This is not to detract from their importance, but what this second contradiction demonstrates is that *necessarily, in any engagement with the mainstream viz., the postmodern challenge, postmodernism cannot escape some of the assumptions of the mainstream, meaning that*

it fails in its self-described mission. Furthermore, not only does this indicate a failure, it also demonstrates that every time postmodernism engages with the mainstream, it assumes this reasoning, meaning that the general argument is rather a necessary argument because postmodernism cannot avoid relying on mainstream assumptions.