

Conclusion

At the end of chapter three I showed the strong support for a general argument that underlies the entire thesis, which was that postmodernism cannot avoid relying on mainstream assumptions. This argument was also shown in a more specific sense in the main hypothesis, which is that postmodernism cannot be maintained as a competing epistemological position because its arguments imply self-contradictions. This hypothesis was formulated in response to the postmodern challenge to the mainstream assumption that reality exists independently of us, and we can know this reality. The challenge then, lies along two lines. The first is the postmodern challenge to reality, which is the denial that there is a world “out there,” regardless of what we think. Reality *is created* by our theories, opinions, etc., which are guided by the interests of power. Therefore the postmodern challenge to reality consists of showing *how* reality has been “brought into existence” by mainstream IR theory rather than having an innocent existence. The second is the postmodern challenge to knowledge: empiricist mainstream epistemology is a power-created discourse, its methods of justification are discursively controlled, and knowledge is created, not “discovered.” Coupled with observations on how these discourses and methods are exclusionary and harmful, postmodernists recommend us to reject mainstream epistemology completely. To respond to these challenges, three sub-hypothesis were formulated.

Sub-hypothesis one was 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. While this is a metaphysical argument, it

incorporates into epistemology because it supports the objectivism assumed by the mainstream, and discredits discursive reality-creating arguments seen elsewhere in postmodernist epistemology. This was treated in chapter one, whose main argument was that a contradiction arises when postmodernists talk about the world, because their position on reality cannot offer a valid causal account that supports claims about how real events are discursively created. They rely on a weak account of agent causation which offers limited support to the grander claims they intend. I argued 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. In addition to supporting sub-hypothesis one, this argument demonstrates that the postmodern challenge to reality is ineffective.

Sub-hypothesis two was that the postmodern justification of knowledge rejects mainstream epistemology but ignores important epistemic principles such as cognitive functioning and deductive and inductive reasoning. Rather, it views knowledge as a discursive construct created in the interest of a powerful source. But the reliance on this assumption, I argued, creates a self-contradiction in that it is itself an empirical statement. This argument was treated in chapter two, and consists of two different arguments. The first dealt with the postmodernist's rejection of mainstream epistemology. It was demonstrated that postmodernists reject it, but in reality do not offer any specific refutations of the cognitive or logical elements that make up mainstream justification. The reason for this was that postmodernists advance a discourse creation type of argument which completely avoids discussing a knowing subject, and as such completely avoids refuting mainstream justification.

The second argument involved taking the discourse-creation argument a step further and analyzing the assumption typical to postmodern justification, that when a powerful discourse is created, such as the empiricist account of knowledge, certain other discourses or groups are dominated by this discourse, which postmodernists see as harmful. However, it was pointed out that if it being harmful was indeed true, we could only know so by somehow understanding it as an empirical statement. It is possible then to infer that the rejection of empiricism the postmodernists favor rests on an empirical assumption, which is self-contradictory. Sub-hypothesis two rests on this argument. Both arguments taken together offer proof that the portion of the postmodern challenge dealing with justification: that is, the part that denies empiricism and advances a discursively created account of knowledge, is ineffective.

Sub-hypothesis three was that the normative elements in the postmodern position mirror those of the mainstream one, resulting in a self-contradiction. Normative there was understood as which justification should be followed, given some epistemic goal. It was shown in chapter three that postmodernists reject mainstream justification because it excludes other ways of knowing, yet the basis of postmodernism is rejecting all types of justification not like it. If postmodernism occupied the place that the mainstream does (that is, if *it* were the accepted justification), mainstream justification would be excluded in a like fashion. So postmodernism is really no better than the mainstream in this sense. Within the course of this argument, the threat of relativism was considered, because admitting different epistemic goals resembled typical accounts of relativism. Nevertheless, this threat was countered because the admittance of alternative epistemic goals does not necessarily mean that those goals are valid e.g., the postmodern epistemic

goal of power/knowledge has several arguments against it. While some sort of weak relativism might lurk in the shadows, the strong version that opposes objectivism is not implied here.

The arguments behind sub-hypotheses two and three defeat the postmodern challenge to knowledge, which is that mainstream epistemology should be rejected completely. To begin with, it is pointed out how postmodernists do not give any reasons which refute the bases (belief generation and transmission principles) of empiricism. Such reasons are necessary in order to substantiate such a rejection. In the absence of these reasons, the principle strategy then is to push for the end of empiricism by offering up empirical evidence—a strategy that goes nowhere. Overall, the main point is that the radical results that postmodernists desire are unattainable because they are not fully *independent* from the mainstream. Despite appearances, postmodernism has much common ground with the mainstream, which means it cannot conceivably follow through with its challenge and must admit defeat.

Furthermore, sub-hypothesis three completes a three-part argument that demonstrates the failure of postmodernism as a competing epistemological position. This was defined as a rival epistemological account that makes certain claims about the world, but that is backed up by a particular justification, and aspires to establish that justification as *the* justification in its discipline. These justifications should be different enough so as not to overlap, in the sense that those claims that they do reach are incompatible with each other. In three distinct cases, and despite its full intentions to establish itself as a competing epistemological position, postmodernism was shown to be unable to do this. The reasons were that somewhere in its justification, postmodernism employed a

mainstream assumption, implying that postmodernism both rejected and accepted the assumption. This was identified as a self-contradiction, and taken altogether, lent support to the main hypothesis that postmodernism cannot be maintained as a competing epistemological position, because it implies self-contradictions.

1. General conclusions and suggestions for further research

So why are these conclusions significant to IR theory? Most specifically, there is a definite niche within the third debate literature for them. As I briefly mentioned in the thesis's introduction, there exists a certain hopefulness around the possibility of going beyond empiricism. Empiricism's predicted undoing was "expected to facilitate trailblazing ideas about the nature and progression of knowledge in the international relations field,"¹ meaning, among other things, room for alternative epistemologies like postmodernism. I am not claiming to have extinguished that hopefulness in general, but I believe I have done so in a particular case. In at least one important sense, postmodernism offers no promise to fulfill those expectations, because as the argument in chapter three shows, many points in the nature and progression of postmodern knowledge are similar to the mainstream's empiricism.

Additionally, there is also a limit to the discursive reality-creating arguments that are prevalent within the third debate. In chapter one I show a way to counter this type of argument. While Smith's case was a specific, and rather extreme, version of this argument, more general statements are seen throughout the third debate. Shapiro for example, reminds us that "[first] 'reality' is mediated by a mode of representation and,

¹ Yosef Lapid, "The Third Debate: On the Prospects of International Theory in a Post-Positivist Era," *International Studies Quarterly* 33 (1989): 238-9.

second, that representations are not descriptions of a world of facticity, but are ways of *making* facticity.”² Ashley maintains a similar view.³ These arguments, while they might not fall to the same criticism as Smith’s, still fall to the more general argument that showed that when rival “creation” claims are assessed, it *is* possible to go beyond discourse to get to the bottom of a particular claim.

In general, I have shown a strengthened version of the empiricism that comes under attack but is rarely understood. I call it strengthened because my discussions should have offered at least a clearer notion of what that empiricism *is* by bringing together scattered statements of it, and showing how these are relevant to contemporary discussions in epistemology. The latter point is enough to demonstrate that empiricism is in no danger of being left by the wayside, and in a way this offers further support for empiricism in IR theory. The reason for this is that IR empiricism is often associated with positivism, and although these are related, they are not the same. Many postmodern scholars equate the fall of positivism with the fall of empiricism but that is a *non sequitor*. What I hope to have done to help counter that belief is show a more contemporary expression of empiricism. Of course, the limitation to my own hopefulness is that the empiricism I have defended has only been defended against a few specific arguments. I cannot back up the claim that the strengthened version of empiricism here is bulletproof, because there could be challenges to it that engage it in a more effective way than postmodernism. Nevertheless, I believe that it stands up to the challenge considered here.

² Michael J. Shapiro, “Textualizing Global Politics,” in *International/Intertextual Relations: Postmodern Readings of World Politics*, eds. James Der Derian and Michael J. Shapiro (Lexington: Lexington Books 1989), 13-4.

³ 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), 244.

However, this moves my discussion into a general question and problem I have with the postmodern position. To begin with, I understand the link with the postmodern preoccupation with discourses and repressed groups—I understand it in theoretical terms. But why is the problem addressed that way? Why is an empirical problem surrounded by impenetrable (by their own doing) theoretical argument that precludes an increased number of people working on it? In particular, why do they advance this argument alongside a critique of empiricism? This makes the social issue seem secondary, and indeed, engagement with the social aspect of the postmodern challenge is usually only secondary. In my opinion, this makes it possible to question the postmodernists' motives, in the sense that they really are not concerned with society at all. Or more importantly, argue that their discourses are motivated by something other than concern and are therefore suspect. In either case, the real losers are the “real” losers, i.e., the repressed groups.

An example of this comes from recent work within the third debate which considers whether “reflective” work (including postmodernism) can be synthesized into a mainstream position. Moravcsik has highlighted a several areas where mainstream theoretical assumptions are used to tackle problems related to postmodernism, such as the evolution of international human rights norms.⁴ Nevertheless, in response to this, Smith dismissed the proposal, saying this,

The call for synthesis is mistaken because it assumes that we can find out the truth about the world out there by combining theories and approaches...Dialogue is not going to be

⁴ Andrew Moravcsik, “Theory Synthesis in International Relations: Real not Metaphysical,” *International Studies Review* 5 (March 2003): 132.

easy, or even possible, in international relations until the discipline becomes less dominated by a narrow orthodoxy reflecting historically and culturally specific interests.⁵

In my opinion, Smith's reaction demonstrates an asymmetrical unwillingness to engage in the issues. Indeed, his main problem with Moravcsik's work is that it "does not include those who have different epistemologies to that of the mainstream."⁶ As I mentioned above, the postmodernist seems to be motivated not by social issues, because which epistemology a theorist uses has little or nothing to do with real world problems. The problems will still be problems, no matter what epistemology one uses. This is one reason why I question postmodernists' motivation, and which invites a closer look into the politics of inclusion.

The politics of inclusion have been addressed as a motivating factor for postmodernist IR theory, but thus far have not been treated in detail. In doing so, no new twists will be added, such as a change in meaning, or a denial of them as a motivating factor. Rather I wish to reiterate the position and then extract three premises—which are lifted from arguments seen throughout the thesis. Unfortunately there is a little backtracking here, but this is necessary in order for me to put forward the concluding argument that the politics of inclusion are actually exclusionary in postmodernist's hands, and how their contentious view of language does more harm than good for their case. In defending this latter claim, I will draw attention to the implications of my own challenge to postmodernism, and then briefly reflect on how the politics of inclusion can be accommodated by the mainstream position.

⁵ Steve Smith, "Dialogue and Reinforcement of Orthodoxy in International Relations," *International Studies Review* 5 (March 2003): 143.

⁶ Steve Smith, "Dialogue and Reinforcement of Orthodoxy in International Relations," 143.

To begin with, it will be remembered that the politics of inclusion calls attention to the wide variation of humankind. This is “a view of the human world as irreducibly and irrevocably pluralistic, split into a multiple of sovereign units and sights of authority, with no horizontal or vertical order.”⁷ A problem arises when order is assumed (or imposed) on humans, which is the case for social sciences in general, and IR theory in particular. The order referred to here in IR theory usually involves the rational behavior of various international actors. However, in focusing attention upon these, many other actors and groups are excluded, ones which do not fit into the general political and economic categories as the former. The explanation for not fitting is then approached as a metaphysical problem, rather than an epistemological one, and in order to change this, and end to such metaphysics is called for. In other words, “totalizing metanarratives conferring ontological centrality on certain key groups...has been abandoned in recognition of the proliferation of social movements that now constitute the spectrum of left politics.”⁸ In basic terms then, the politics of inclusion seeks to include more subjects in the study of IR by abandoning taken-for-granted metaphysical assumptions.

The first premise I include is the factor of inclusion, which acknowledges a wider base of subjects of study than previously admitted in traditional IR theory. This base would include what I referred to previously as the “real losers.” Ashley and Walker, in a seminal postmodern article,⁹ call these groups “exiles” rather than “losers,” because they have been exiled from the sharp, bounded categories of IR theory. These exiles include single working mothers, draft-age youths, alien workers, and several other displaced

⁷ D. S. L. Jarvis, *International Relations and the Challenge of Postmodernism* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2000), 75.

⁸ Jarvis, *International Relations and the Challenge of Postmodernism*, 75.

⁹ Richard K. Ashley and R. B. J. Walker, “Speaking the Language of Exile: Dissident Thought in International Studies,” in *Classics of International Relations*, 3rd ed., ed. John A. Vasquez (Prentice Hall: Upper Saddle River, 1996), 102.

individuals.¹⁰ In this first premise then, inclusion focuses on drawing attention to these “marginal sites...proliferating in modern global life today.”¹¹

The second premise concerns a jump from the subjects to the metaphysical assumptions of the nature of language. That is, postmodernists assert that the very elaboration of mainstream IR theory has created a corresponding world complete with rigid categories into which these people do not fit. The basic argument has to do with the discursive manipulation of logocentric meaning, which was treated in chapter one. Ashley and Walker argue that the reason why disparate subjects are not included is due to “arbitrary cultural practices that work to discipline ambiguity and impose effects of identity and meaning by erecting exclusionary boundaries.”¹² In other words, the second premise involves pointing out exclusionary metaphysical/linguistic tactics within mainstream discourse.

Premise three is where the politics come in. Returning to Smith’s analysis of academics as political moves,¹³ the creation of metanarratives or discourse is identified as a political action carried out by those in power. However, in the same way that discourses can be oppressive or liberating, the politics of inclusion emerges to break the metaphysical hold by imploring IR theorists to recognize systematic biases and to open spaces. Such is the main trajectory of Smith’s work, “to explain how power is constituted and...reveal its exclusionary practices in order to create space for critical thought and

¹⁰ Ashley and Walker, “Speaking the Language of Exile,” 102-3.

¹¹ Ashley and Walker, “Speaking the Language of Exile,” 103.

¹² Ashley and Walker, “Speaking the Language of Exile,” 103.

¹³ Steve Smith, “Singing Our World into Existence: International Relations Theory and September 11,” *International Studies Quarterly* 48 (2004): 504.

action.”¹⁴ Premise three involves a political reaction against discourses via deconstructive, discourse analysis, etc. practices.

These three premises behind the politics of inclusion are little more than a plodding reminder of what has been seen throughout the thesis. But I believe they reveal a more surprising conclusion that postmodernists intend: that the politics of inclusion are exclusionary rather than inclusive, in that they reject mainstream proposals for inclusion. How can this be? The quick answer is that in shifting the focus from groups to language (premise two), what becomes more important is not *the type* of research one intends to do but rather *the side you write from*. This is seen in a closer inspection of the opening of spaces. What lies behind this practice is the assumption that any mainstream language is will be mainstream exclusionary discourse solely because of its provenance, and must be rejected. In addition, there are the linked assumptions about the exclusionary discursive practices (e.g., justification) and the whole gamut, which also must be rejected. These observations shed light on Smith and Moravcsik’s differences mentioned earlier. Postmodernists, in opposing themselves to a metaphysical/linguistic criterion, exclude any possible contributor to a particular social problem that is not a part of them. The implications of this are harmful to the original mission of the politics of inclusion, as I will demonstrate, but first I will go over a few reasons why this second premise is mistaken.

I want to begin by questioning the postmodernists’ jump from the observation that subjects are excluded to the metaphysical assumptions they make about language. The retreat to metaphysics seems uncalled for in the sense that the perceived state of affairs in IR is no fault of language. The motivation is obvious enough—that in explaining how

¹⁴ George, *Discourses of Global Politics*, 30.

language is used, certain exclusions and/or discrepancies can be understood theoretically—but this is not sufficient justification. In fact, it is a completely mistaken conclusion.

The perceived state of affairs in IR theory is an epistemological problem that has nothing to do with metaphysics postmodernists appeal to, in spite of the fact that it is framed that way. The most reasonable epistemological explanation that certain subjects are not considered is because they fall outside the specific observations made in elaborating a certain theory. *But from this statement there is no reason to suppose that these subjects could not possibly be accounted for if they somehow fit into that theory.* For example, if one is studying voter demographics in the U.S. it makes little sense to study cats and dogs as well, but that in no way implies epistemologically that they could not be studied. In other words, in the epistemological sense the “exiled” are not necessarily exiled because there is the possibility that they could be included in a given theory. This provides a decent response to the epistemological problem, and also sets the groundwork for more important metaphysical conclusions.

When the exiled subject becomes a possible candidate for inclusion in IR theory, it is granted a certain epistemic status. The very important point here is that this status implies that the subject *already has a specific propositional content*. Propositional content, it will be remembered, is the verbal articulation of mental representations, mainly experience, that allow logical inferences from one belief to another. What this means is that in the very moment of being experienced empirically (e.g., by observation), any subject is immediately fit into the linguistic framework of the mainstream. Assuming certain points of agreement, this implies that *the mainstream sees and talks about the*

world in exactly the same way as the postmodernists do, which counters the metaphysical assumption that mainstream language exiles certain subjects. Furthermore, since all postmodernist thought begins with an empirical observation, it is possible to infer that every postmodern thought, problem, subject, etc. could be included within the mainstream position. This effectively turns the postmodernists' exclusionary metaphysical argument on its head, and defeats premise two.

Despite the foregoing argument, postmodernists continue to maintain the epistemological/metaphysical confusion, and this accounts for one of the principle reasons of the exclusionary of the politics of inclusion. For example, the point that postmodernists have an empirical starting point creates a common ground—but why is there such a gulf when it comes to addressing the same points? The gulf comes from maintaining the epistemological/metaphysical confusion—the perpetration of which falls on the postmodernist side of things. In effect, they have made an epistemological point of agreement impossible to discuss.

Finally, a good case can be made for the exclusivity if we move away from inclusion and look to politics. In chapter one, Smith's study of the nature of mainstream discourse led him to the general conclusion that "it is unavoidably partial, is unavoidably political, and unavoidably has ethical consequences."¹⁵ If this is his general conclusion, there is no reason at all why the same conclusion cannot be drawn for him. The reason is that in creating a response, the same elements from the original are reproduced (albeit they are opposite). That the political argument should be applied to postmodernists does not mean that there is a contradiction like before, because Smith does not deny this point

¹⁵ Smith, "Singing Our World into Existence," 504.

like he does epistemology and metaphysics. Rather, in concluding what he does he makes it impossible not to engage in an exclusionary political action.

The theoretical consequences of this exclusion are that postmodernists are so theoretically opposed to the mainstream that it seems that they have to disagree with them. On any substantial problem posed by postmodernism, a mainstream proposal to it will be rejected, presumably because it will become part of the logocentric structure of domination, or something similar to that. But this is a poor answer to a worthwhile question. The reason for that is that it confuses the presentation of the problem with the problem itself, meaning that postmodernism, by its own admission, will give up on its motivating factors if they are not put in their own terms. This implies that postmodernism would give up on itself if all of its problems were assumed by the mainstream.

There is a practical, or “real world” side to this as well. Inclusion understood by the postmodernists has been abandoned because the focus has effectively been shifted from groups to more abstract irrelevant matters. What this means in a practical sense is that the possibility to take advantage of a wider body of inquirers is limited. Also a focus on who can and cannot speak about the same issue effectively becomes a red herring that drags important attention away from the issue at hand. Keohane’s view of the third debate—that it takes attention away from the real issues at hand—acknowledges this much. In any case, despite what the concept of inclusion suggests, we can definitely see an opposite trend in that worthwhile questions get rejected for minute abstract reasons. Practically speaking, that does nothing to help the cause.

In this defense of how postmodernists exclude with the politics of inclusion, I believe I have shown one more way postmodernism is inadequate. In this case, though,

the inadequacy is enough to bring it down, for two principle reasons. First, the politics of inclusion is the guiding force of postmodernist thought, i.e., individual postmodernists may have this or that idea, be Foucault or Irigaray disciples, etc., but the bottom line is always the opening of spaces, emancipation, or any such freeing action. Yet so long as these actions are couched in the metaphysical/linguistic sense that they are, the objections retain their validity, and a general conclusion is that postmodernist IR theory simply does not live up to its claims. One drawback to this conclusion is that it puts in doubt past postmodern conclusions which had an emancipatory effect—which does seem to have an exclusionary air about it. Nevertheless, this is an allowable drawback, because it in no way implies that such cases cannot be returned to. It was not the politics of inclusion in general that were rejected, just the postmodernists' handling of them.

In addition, the reality-creating metaphysical argument—a hallmark of postmodernism—has been dealt a damaging blow that is not countered within the postmodernists' arsenal. This came in my denial of the second premise, and is important because it demonstrated that in propositional content no subject is exiled. This demonstration disproves any *a priori* exclusionary arguments, which are necessary if one is to succeed in arguing that such-and-such discourse creates reality in a certain way. In order to counter this argument, the postmodernist would have to refute the portion of mainstream epistemology that includes propositional content. However, I have already pointed out that they offer no such refutation, and as such cannot respond to this challenge. If postmodernists cannot continue to hold that so many subjects are exiled by the mainstream, what do they have to hold on to?

In theory, the “real world” can be a congenial place for the politics of inclusion once all the looming pretensions of postmodernism are stripped away from the language they use. In this sense one can see that it is not a congenial world for many is not the fault of a small, insignificant (within the larger scheme of things) group of scholars, but due to the myriad occurrence of events beyond the immediate control of any human. Keeping these events without distortion so they may be understood seems to me to be the most useful attribute that the mainstream can offer the politics of inclusion. Postmodernism, on the other hand, *always* places language at the center of universe, and effectively, this becomes the universe itself.

Based upon these observations of postmodernism, I believe an interesting possibility for future research would be to tackle the issues that motivate postmodernism, but from a mainstream epistemological position. This would answer the question—how can marginalized groups in the politics of inclusion actually benefit from mainstream methods? In other words, what would postmodernist concerns be sans reactionary views on knowledge and reality? Would the proposals put forth look that much different from the postmodern ones? If they were, how would they differ? I believe that, at the very least, this would create a greater chance for cooperation and collaboration, but not simply because they are being addressed from the mainstream. Rather, this belief stems from the fact that there would not be so many *a priori* limitations on who can discuss the problems and who cannot.