

James Sire, *The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalog*  
Chapter 9: The Vanished Horizon:  
Postmodernism

Check out postmodernism online:

<http://www.colorado.edu/English/ENGL2012Klages/pomo.html>

<http://www.xenos.org/ministries/crossroads/pmandyou.htm>

<http://www.users.voicenet.com/~grassie/Fldr.Articles/Postmodernism.html>

Introduction:

Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Parable of the Madman*

God was dead and since the existence of God was the basis and center of Western civilization, then it must endure the most serious consequences, not just in the area of religion or theology, but the entire superstructure of culture which was based upon God's existence, including an understanding of the human self.

This marks the beginnings of what is now called postmodernism.

God, as the basis of Western culture, the horizon defining the limits of our world, the center holding us in place has vanished. In its place we have in postmodernism a pluralism of perspectives, a plethora of philosophical possibilities, a welter of worldviews with no one point of view in ascendancy.

## I. The Problem of Definition

A. In architecture

B. In culture studies

C. In philosophy

## II. The Basic Features of Postmodernism

A. The first question postmodernism addresses is not what is there or how we know what is there but how language functions to construct meaning itself. In other words, there has been a shift from 'first things' from being to knowing to constructing meaning.

1. The first shift is from the premodern, essentially Christian world to the modern secular world
    - a. The premodern, Christian world was primarily concerned with ultimate reality, with being, that is with God himself, God who as we have learned is infinite, personal, transcendent, immanent, omniscient, sovereign and good.
    - b. Even Dr. Sires questions about worldviews reflect this priority in God:
  2. And this signals the second major shift, the shift from the modern to the postmodern world, again from an emphasis on being in the premodern world, to knowing in the modern world, to meaning in the postmodern world.
- B. The Death of Truth: If independent human knowers are incapable of arriving at truth on their own, then “the truth about the reality is forever hidden from us. All we can do is tell stories.”
1. There is the movement with the premodern Christian of God and a revealed biblical narrative that explains the nature of reality to
  2. The modern idea of the independent human knower, rationalist or empiricist, with the capacity to know truth, to
  3. The postmodern notion that reason and human knowledge is fallible, and all we can do is create our own stories out of language to create meaning to serve our own purposes.
- C. Language as power. All narratives make a play for power. Any one narrative or story used as a metanarrative or master story is oppressive.
1. A premodern acceptance of the scriptural story of creation, fall, redemption revealed by God in the bible to
  2. The modern story of the epistemological and scientific powers of humanity which can discover truth about reality to
  3. A postmodern reduction of all stories, premodern and modern, as power plays.

- D. What is a person? According to postmodernism, “human beings make themselves who they are by the languages they construct about themselves.” This results in the death of the substantial self.
1. The theistic conception of the person as made in the image of God to...
  2. The modern notion of the person as the result of random evolutionary processes...
  3. To the postmodern notion of the insubstantial self created by language in a powerful social situation.
- E. Can we be good without God. Like naturalism and existentialism, postmodernism realizes that ethics are a human creation, especially through language.
- “Ethics, like knowledge, is a linguistic construct. Social good, therefore, is whatever society takes it to be.
- (1) Premodern ethics are based on the goodness of a transcendent God who has revealed his moral will to humanity in scripture;
  - (2) To modern ethics based on the idea of a universal human reason and experience and the human ability to determine right and wrong, to,
  - (3) The postmodern notion that morality is grounded only in the language of a culture which is free to legislate any form of morality, esp. by those in power.
- F. The cutting edge of culture is now in literary theory.

Critique: Three positive and three negative features:

Positive:

1. Postmodernism critique of modern, optimistic naturalism is often on target.

2. The postmodern recognition that language and story is closely associated with power is useful.
3. The postmodern attention to how social and cultural conditions from and by which we understand the world can alert us to the limitations of our own perspectives as finite creatures.

Negative:

1. Postmodernism rejection of all metanarratives becomes a metanarrative, the criticisms of master stories becomes the master story itself. Hence, beware!
2. Postmodernism's notion that we have no access to reality is a claim about reality--it is really real and true that we can't get to what is real and true!
3. Postmodernism's critique of the autonomy and sufficiency of human reason is based on the autonomy and sufficiency of human reason.

The irony is this: if reason itself can't be trusted, how can it be used to make the critique?

**Conclusion:**

- a. We began with **theism** and the infinite personal god who is both transcendent and immanent, personal, omniscient, sovereign and good.
- b. In **Deism**, however, God exists, is the creator of the universe, and is transcendent above it, but no longer immanent within it.
- c. In **naturalism**, God disappears altogether. He is neither immanent, nor transcendent. He is not there at all.
- d. **Nihilism** is the natural child of naturalism.
- e. **Existentialism** thus emerges in an attempt to overcome the meaningless and absurdity of life.

- f. **Eastern pantheistic monism** offers the possibility to be united with the one unified singular reality, but such union means to pass beyond personality, knowledge, morality, history and time.
- g. **The New Age Consciousness** provides a less costly, less culturally and intellectually painful way of transcending human limitations and finding meaning. To do so puts one in touch with the powers of the occult, the mind, or language that is at worst spiritually dangerous and at best deceptive.
- h. Finally, back into Western context, the logical outcome of optimistic modernism is seen in **pessimistic postmodernism** in the move from the premodern emphasis on being, to the modern emphasis on knowing to the postmodern emphasis on meaning which results in the enthronement of language and power, but in the death of truth, the death of the self, the death of ethics.

