

Christian Faith and the Life of the Mind: Engaging Postmodernity

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Overview

What is postmodern philosophy?
How shall Christians respond?
Engaging the Postmodern: Mission as model

What is Postmodern Philosophy?

Is it a time? An "ism"
Not "postmodernism" – too amorphous
Not a time – more of an attitude toward modernity
What is modernity (as a philosophy)?
Enlightenment rationality, prejudices and extreme positions.
Romantic celebration of art, transcendence and "immediacy"
Quest for a universal, self-grounding System.

Agnes Heller & Ferenc Fehér

Postmodernity may be understood as the private-collective time and space, within the wider time and space of modernity, delineated by those who have problems with and queries addressed to modernity, by those who want to take it to task, and by those who make an inventory of modernity's achievements as well as its unresolved dilemmas. . . . Postmodernity thus can only define itself within this plurality, against those heterogeneous others

Postmodernity as a cultural Space

Without modern, no postmodern.
They co-exist and feed each other
The Postmodern is not the opposite of the modern, not an antithesis.
Time is not the particular issue
The question is not what comes "after" postmodernity -- or modernity for that matter!
The issue is more of statement & critique.

Kierkegaard and Nietzsche

We can think of SK and FN as "proto" postmoderns (two types) in the 19 Cent.
Both were critical of rationalism and moral Systems of philosophy.
For FN the new transvaluation of values must be predicated on the death of God.
For SK the knight of faith lives without absolute foundations or a great rational System, but on faith alone (which is not purely rational).

The example of Natural Sciences

The rise of natural science has greatly benefited humanity.
Deeper knowledge, more insights and predictive power.
Loads of important applications.
Natural science does not solve everything, and has caused problems.
Scientific thinking can objectify, dehumanize, and become arrogant and seek to be "value-free."
Scientism is an opponent of faith.
The myth of scientific "neutrality."

The Postmodern Turn

Modernity thinks of Science (big S) as the best or the only right way to think, the only or right way to all truth.
Attempts to use "scientific method" in many domains (politics, economics, ethics).
Postmodern critique: Thomas Kuhn (1970).
Science is a human enterprise, not purely neutral and not value-free.
Science is not self-grounding or purely rational.

Types of Response to Pomo

Hopeful Ostrich
Apologetic Fortress
Pomo Discipleship
Missionary Encounter
Lesslie Newbigin

Missionary Encounter with Culture

Lesslie Newbigin (1909-1998)
Bishop, theologian, missionary leader.
Came back from India with a key idea: gospel's encounter with Western cultural values & philosophies. Critique of Western attitudes and assumptions from an evangelical stance.
Foolishness to the Greeks (1986).
Truth to Tell: The Gospel as Public Truth (1991)

Faith, Science and Postmodernity

Applying the missionary model.
Science and rationality are not the Gospel.
Neither are the excesses of postmodern philosophy.
Both can be useful when properly engaged, understood and criticized from the perspective of evangelical teachings (Word of God).
Postmodern critique helps evangelicals overcome Enlightenment positions that are anti-gospel.
Examples: evidentialism, scientism, classical foundationalism.
Postmodern excesses must also be engaged and criticized (e.g. moral relativism).