

Grenz review



**ASSIGN
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TY 170 February 23, 2009 Grenz Review As time passes, different themes are presented throughout society. These themes tend to make attempts at disproving its predecessor. In Stanley J. Grenz' book, A Primer on Postmodernism, he discusses the two most recent ideas supported by the public; modernism and postmodernism. The opposition is apparent between the eras of modernity and postmodernity. As described by Grenz, modernity focuses on the individual, using reasoning as a source of the truth. This belief causes truth to be relative.

Postmodernity's focal point is the group, rather than the individual. Truth, in the postmodern view, is created by intuition and feeling, causing it to be constructed. Grenz also discusses both the problems postmodernity pose on Christianity and the similarities between postmodernism and Christianity. Grenz' portrait of postmodernism is accurate for what society is facing today. In order to understand the differences between modernism and postmodernism as Grenz has defined them, first understanding of how each was created is needed.

Modernity is based around meta-narratives; stories that connect everyone together. The most profound meta-narrative of modernity is the universal truth of science. One of the most important constructs of modernity is individualism, upon which all modern thinkers based their work. " Most historians suggest that the modern era was born when the Enlightenment brought new hope to war-ravaged Europe" (57). The Enlightenment had four principles; " Reason, nature, autonomy, and harmony" (68). These principles created the foundation for modern thinkers.

Many modern thinkers throughout the era, regardless of their discipline, “Turned to the reasoning subject rather than divine revelation as the starting point for knowledge and reflection” (65). Through these foundations set for modernity, the modern philosophers turned to science in support for their hypotheses. “Thinkers such as Descartes, Newton, and Kant provided the intellectual foundation for the modern era” (80). Rene Descartes was one of the first modern thinkers of his time, “often being referred to as the father of modern philosophy” (63). When Descartes first set out on his journey for knowledge, he set out with doubt, in search of absolute truth that doubt could not deny (64). Like many other thinkers of that period, he “Attempted to introduce the rigor of mathematical demonstration into all fields of knowledge,” because he believed that the truths of mathematics were more concrete than knowledge based on observation (64). Descartes eventually reached the destination of his searching; the one thing that could not be doubted was one’s own existence. His new way of thinking led to a different outlook of the human person.

His work defined “The human being as thinking substance and the human person as an autonomous rational subject” (64). This new definition supported Augustine’s philosophy; “Cogito ergo sum - ‘I think, therefore I am,’” (64). Although Descartes’ work did not discover subjectivity, “the chief importance of his contribution lies in his emphasis on personal experience and personal knowledge, on knowledge arising from the individual’s unique point of view” (64). His role in the Enlightenment paved the path for his modern-thinking successors.

Following Descartes' work, Newton began making his own imprint on the world, emphasizing the importance of science. His work focused on trying to explain the workings of his universe that he saw as a "Grand, orderly machine," (67). Newton's idea of the world as a machine provided the framework for modernity. Newton believed that by viewing the world as a machine, he would be able to know its movements because it would follow a set of distinct laws (67). His design led modern thinkers to have a mechanistic understanding of the world, as opposed to a natural view (50).

Although Newton looked at the scientific explanations of the world, his intent was to explain the existence of God. Similar to Descartes, Newton used the power of reason to enhance the meaning of theology. "The modern world turned out to be Newton's mechanistic universe populated by Descartes' autonomous, rational substance" (67). Through Newton's work, other philosophers had the foundation needed to make their own impressions on the world of modernity. Eventually, philosophers began questioning the Enlightenment and modernity as a whole.

Through Immanuel Kant's work, he strengthened the ties between society and modernity, which associated himself with the beginning of the Enlightenment. Kant's most important contribution to modernity was his publication of *Critique of Pure Reason* (57). His critique strengthened the support of modernity and terminated all questioning of it. Kant sought to create a more concrete platform for metaphysics through his writing (76). He hypothesized that the mind is systematical in organizing sensations from the external world. "According to Kant, the human person is not only a creature capable of sense experience but also a moral being" (77).

Kant believed that by living morally, one lives the way he wishes all people would live. He argued that the moral aspect of human existence is essentially rational (78). This view of existence created the realm of practical reason, which encouraged other modern philosophers to concentrate on the individual self. This attentiveness came from Kant introducing the idea that the self is “not just the focus of philosophical attention but the entire subject matter of philosophy” (79). Through this notion, Kant directed his attention to the individual imposing reality.

Kant's work provided future philosophers with the concepts needed to understand and eventually deconstruct modernity. Johann Gottlieb Fichte operated off of Kant's discoveries. He accepted Kant's work but also “Was enabled to explode it from the inside” (87). Fichte did not want to eliminate Kant's ideas, but instead wanted “To expose the Kantian ‘fiction’ of an objective world existing in its own right beyond the self,” (87). Through his work, Kant emphasized the idea “that the self creates and determines the objects that constitute its own external world” (87). Hence, the realm that Kant claims to know through ‘pure’ reason, Fichte claims to produce through the exercise of ‘practical’ reason” (87). His work has created a freedom that “is important because it holds the potential of liberating us from a single way of understanding the world,” (88). Fichte managed to dissolve Kant's idea of an absolute reality through “eliminating the noumenal realm” (88). Although he worked against Kant in many ways, Fichte managed to uphold Kant's concept of the absolute self (87).

Fichte, along with other thinkers', beliefs led to what is now considered to be the postmodernism era by questioning the context of modernity and its

constructors. Postmodernism is the mere rejection of the ideas that modernism and the Enlightenment support. The main theory that postmodernism rejects is the construct of individualism. In its denunciation of modernism, it also rejects the modern theme of meta-narratives, except for its own. The postmodern world does not believe that all knowledge is good, nor that knowledge is objective. They view life on earth as fragile and believe that the continued existence of humankind is dependent on a new attitude of cooperation rather than conquest" (7). Postmodern beliefs have a more pessimistic view on the world, as opposed to the modern idea. Postmoderns believe that the world is " historical, relational, and personal" (7). The main postmodern view is that everything is different from everything (7). " Many voices have joined the postmodern chorus. But of these, three loom as both central and paradigmatic - Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, and Richard Rorty.

They constitute a trio of postmodern prophets" (123). Michel Foucault was persistent in the rejection of the modern worldview. He argued that " reason and rational discourse are problematic.. , because they require that we squeeze the variety of reality into the artificial homogeneity that accommodates our concepts" (127). His intentions were not to present the ideas of a better society, but to understand order. This new society that Foucault presented was called "'heterotopia,'" as opposed to the modern view of " utopia" (20).

Foucault focused on the connection between knowledge and power in regards to social systems, stating that " every interpretation of reality is an assertion of power" (6). Foucault believed that this power was " the power

of violence” (59). He used genealogy to gain a better understanding of how we arrived to the beliefs supported by society (135). “ According to Foucault, the practice of genealogy informs us that history is not controlled by destiny or some regulative mechanism but is the product of haphazard conflicts” (136).

He reveals himself to be the model postmodern by making the assertion that “ no natural order lies behind what we invent through our use of language” (137). Foucault provided a new outlet for the newly formed notion to be interpreted by future philosophers. Subsequent to Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida reinterpreted some ideas of postmodernism. Unlike Foucault, Derrida had different views on what was in correct about modernism. He focused on defying logocentrism: “ The philosophical method that looks to the word as the carrier of meaning” (141).

He began, in a sense, where Kant left of by questioning “ what foundation can we offer for our use of reason” (140). Derrida was critical of Western philosophers in saying that they view writing as a demonstration of speech. He spent his lifetime of work trying to deconstruct the idea that written language represents reality. Unlike Foucault, Derrida did not try to create new ideas for postmodernism on the basis of old ideas; he rather deconstructed or disproved the foundations of modernism. Derrida wanted to demolish the modern construct that “ views philosophy as pure, disinterested inquiry” (148).

Along with that, he also wanted to renounce the popular idea that there is a clear link between language and the external world, (148). “ Derrida’s primary goal is to divest us of logocentrism by showing the impossibility of

drawing a clear line between reality and our linguistic representations” (148). Overall, Derrida’s target for deconstruction was Western philosophy as a whole. The ideas represented by the philosophy were viewed as hopeless by Derrida. The notions that Derrida brought to the table allowed thinkers to move past the modern ways and seek refuge in postmodernism.

After Derrida, came a philosopher with a new way of thinking, Richard Rorty. Unlike his predecessors, Rorty expressed his belief in a clear style. Rorty is considered to be “ the central figure behind the renewed interest in the American pragmatist tradition” (151). His pragmatist outlook abandoned an Enlightenment idea; “ The mind is the ‘ mirror of nature’” (151). In pragmatism, the view of truth is that it is a result of human convention, thus it is constructed. Similar to Derrida, Rorty believes that language does not have the capability to represent the world accurately.

He views language as a device used to satisfy one’s wants and needs. Working against modernism, he also states that “ we give up the idea that the goal of science is to produce models that correspond perfectly with reality” (154). Rorty believes that science is just one way to view the world, but there are many other ways to perceive it. Through the work of Foucault, Derrida, and Rorty, a new way of thinking was born which opened the world up for questioning. Postmodernism and Christianity have a working relationship. That is, Christians support and also disagree with some postmodern concepts.

When postmodernism was first presented as an idea, Christians did not know how to approach it. A concern that Christians have with the postmodern view is the rejection of meta-narratives. The concept of stories uniting a group as

one is the foundation for Christianity. As Grenz states, " We simply do not share the despair over the loss of universality that leads to the radical skepticism of the emerging era" (165). In addition to the rejection of meta-narratives, postmodernism focuses on the inability to discover an all-encompassing truth. Here lies the major dilemma Christianity has with postmodernity.

Christians believe that God includes the truth about everything, but postmodern thinkers do not believe that an " all-encompassing truth" is possible to reach (163). The postmodern rejection of individualism worries Christians because they " must always keep in view the biblical themes of God's concern for each person, the responsibility of every human before God, and the individual orientation that lies within the salvation message" (168). On the other hand, Christians support the rejection of the Enlightenment idea that " the rational, scientific method is the sole measure of truth" (166).

Also, the postmodern denial that all knowledge is good and objective strengthens the ties between Christianity and postmodernism (168). Christians also support the postmodern finding that no person can be separate from creation. As years pass, Christians are more accepting of postmodern concepts and are more rejecting of the modern ideas they once supported. Grenz' view of the postmodern world is acceptable for what society faces today. The postmodern views have been mirrored throughout the public. Even in school, teachers focus more on group projects and group activities rather than the individuals.

Children judge each other on the amount of time they spend with others, as opposed to the ability to spend time alone. Now, it is a must for children to

always be with their friends. It is also represented in the working world. Bosses would prefer group presentations rather than individual. Most people do not like to be alone or even to be singled-out. Also, as the economy is closer to being in a recession, the postmodern idea that the world is not getting better every day is strengthened. People no longer believe "that humanity will be able to solve the world's greatest problems or even that their economic situation will surpass that of their parents," (7). Every day it seems as though the world is not capable to overcome what it has started, such as wars. It seems as though the world is no longer a "happy" place at most times. The postmodern pessimistic view is presented daily. It is awkward for others when people are optimistic about their life. Overall, people seem accepting to the postmodern views. Over the years, the world has seen different phases sweep through, and each one is eventually accepted. The most current themes are modernity and postmodernity.

The modern views were set forth by Rene Descartes, Isaac Newton, and Immanuel Kant. Modernism is the idea of focusing on the individual in means of scientific explanations. Also, modern thinkers believe that all knowledge is inherently good. Johann Gottlieb Fichte is partially responsible for the beginning of questioning modernity. Once Fichte opened the doors, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, and Richard Rorty put an end to the modern way of thinking. What their idea created was postmodernity. The postmodern thinker steps away from the individual, focusing more on group relations.

Also, postmodernism denies that all knowledge is essentially good. This new way of thinking has made Christians question how to respond. Christians agree, but also disagree with some of the postmodern views. As a whole, the

world has come to terms with postmodernism by accepting it. What is going to happen when philosophers begin to question postmodernity? How will the world be viewed once people stop accepting postmodernism? Works Cited
Grenz, Stanley J. A Primer on Postmodernism. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996.