

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH PATNA UNIVERSITY

POSTMODERNISM NOTES

Lyotard: The postmodern Condition

Some major points.

Lyotard wants to say that the time has arrived to “stage a war on totality; let us be witnesses to the unrepresentable; let us activate the differences and save the honour of the name”.

- Approach towards reason with skepticism.
- Technology is an instrument of distraction as well as progress.
- The postmodern temperament finds such conclusive stories (derived from meta narrative) unsuited to the world.
- Postmodernism favours seeing the world in more rhetorical terms where it pictures the world as a field where several smaller narratives are contesting with each other.
- Postmodernism is faulted for not taking a stand on issues of value.
- Lyotard thinks that all values are topics of debate and the debate should continue endlessly.
- The postmodernists basically question the legitimacy of totality.
- They also question the authority of one narrative over other narratives.
- Postmodernism does away with any sort of moral judgement.
- When Lyotard is talking about pragmatic valences he simply means that each of these narratives have arguments and points of views of their own. They are practical in their own context.
- Postmodern knowledge is not simply a tool of the authorities; it refines our sensitivity to differences and reinforces our ability to tolerate the incommensurable.
- The state receives its legitimacy not from itself but from the people.
- The definition of knowledge is defined by the people in power.
- The people decide that what is needed to determine the legitimacy of truth or justice is simply their debate.
- Out of the two predominant versions of the narrative of legitimation, the first is humanity as the hero of liberty. So knowledge was validated by humanity.
- In the post industrial society the grand narrative is dead.

- In the postmodern era these three things offer legitimation:
1) social bond 2) conscience 3) communication

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- The essay asks the following major questions. : How do we define 'knowledge' in a postindustrial society equipped with new media, instantaneous communication technologies and universal access to information? Who controls it's transmission? How can scientific knowledge be legitimated?
 - The definition of knowledge is determined by intertwining forces of power, authority, and government.
 - In the postindustrial society, the grand narrative is dead.

Sources

Rivkin and Ryan

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy