

## “THAT YOU MAY BELIEVE”: THE FACT/ACT—BELIEF/BELIEVE—of FAITH

Jn 20:24-31, 18:37-38; 3:12, 16-17; 14:11; 19:35; Heb 1:1-3

### I. PILATE’S POSE: “WHAT IS TRUTH?” (Jn 18:37-38)

- A. Perennial Perspective—ancient skepticism: “I know nothing” (remember Sergeant Schultz?); Diogenes in Athens; “No Nothing” political party
- B. Current “Post-truth” (2016 “word of the year” for Oxford dictionaries) fashions
  - 1. Justice Cavanaugh Senate hearings & Democrat senator’s “your truth” assertions
  - 2. In New York, Mayor Bill de Blasio approves changing sex on birth certificates
  - 3. Equality Act recently passed House of Representatives—denying biological data

### II. JOHN’S PERSPECTIVE (evident in Jn 3:16)

- A. Avoiding Antinomies
  - 1. Neither “zeal without knowledge” (Ro 10:2)—Huck Finn believing “what ain’t so”; fanatics of various sorts; cf. Eric Hoffer’s *True Believers*; evident in theories justifying irrationality
    - a. Islam—given an arbitrary Allah, fatalism, nominalism accentuated; NB Regensberg Address
    - b. Double truth view in Abelard’s *Sic et Non*—current naturalistic scientist + biblical believer
    - c. Fideism—“faith alone” espoused by Tertullian *et al*—ignore data of science, history, etc.
  - 2. Nor worldly “wisdom” (I Cor 2:1)—ancient Greek rationalism, Gnosticism; Enlightenment “know everything” optimism; modern scientism
- B. Endorsing a “reasonable faith” (William Craig’s web page)—the consensual, orthodox tradition: Augustine; Aquinas; Calvin; Wesley; C.S. Lewis; John Paul II’s *Fides et ratio*; believing in the Supernatural does not commit one to believing in the Irrational
  - 1. Fact-Based, Noun {Belief}—Embracing Objective Reality (cf. Ro 1-2) re God, man, revelation; C.S. Lewis: “If truth is objective, if we live in a world we did not create and cannot change merely by thinking, if the world is not really a dream of our own, then the most destructive belief we could possibly believe would be the denial of this primary fact. It would be like closing your eyes while driving, or blissfully ignoring the doctor’s warnings.” C.S. Lewis: “Religion involves a series of statements about facts, which must be either true or false. If they are true, one set of conclusions will follow about the right sailing of the human fleet; if they are false, quite a different set.”
  - 2. Act-Driven, Verb {Believe}—Granting Subjectively & acknowledging various truth tests
    - a. Skepticism—Pilate & Post-Modern doubting at times healthy; e.g.. dietary claims or Second Coming predictions
    - b. Pragmatism—Caiphas consults populace; e.g. computer advice or proverbs such as “spare the rod and spoil the child”
    - c. Coherence—“testing” scriptures to determine context; e.g. theoretical physics or doctrine of Providence
    - d. Correspondence—Common Sense Commitment (Aristotle: “To say of what is that it is, or what is not that it is not, is true”); e.g. Pikes Peak, baseball, Pastor Dieter, frontier history or Gospel data
  - 3. Act-Discerning--Acknowledging degrees of subjective certainty re truths/Truth apprehended
    - a. Fantasies—daydreams, self-talk promoting self-esteem, generally delusional; so too some “beliefs” such as “whatsoever ask” entail risks
    - b. Opinions—acknowledged personal perspectives, tentative views (e.g. “I was wrong” re acid rain and ozone hole, cholesterol, denominational “standards” etc.)
    - c. Beliefs—strongly-held, durable convictions (e.g. America admirable, Thomistic/Arminian theology)
    - d. Certainties—demonstrable, unquestionable (e.g. Euclidian geometry; ethical precepts; Nicene Creed)
- C. Steadfastly asserting the Essence of Christian Faith: Christ Jesus is “THE TRUTH”
  - 1. He actually/factually/physically **Came** (18:33-38): His Incarnation the Great Miracle
  - 2. He Himself **Declared** (14:16): one of the great “I AM” declarations
  - 3. He, consequently, **IS** God (Jn 1:1); indeed the “very stamp of his [God’s] nature” (Heb 1:1-3)
  - 4. He **Informs** (as the Word) all that Is (Jn 1:1-14), providing forms we discern as our thoughts correspond with what Is Real

## “POSTMODERN” DIVIDENDS

When I first encountered “postmodernism” I wondered at the sheer irrationality of the term itself. After all, *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines “modern” as “being at this time; now existing; of or pertaining to this present and recent times.” By definition, then, *nothing* can be *post-modern*! It is, in fact, oxymoronic—self-contradictory. So I was gratified, recently reading Alexander Solshentisyn’s 1993 essay, “Playing Upon the Strings of Emptiness” (crafted when he was awarded the National Arts Club Medal of Honor for Literature), to find him sharing my view. “Whatever the meaning intended for this term,” he wrote, “its lexical makeup involves an incongruity: the seeming claim that a person can think and experience after the period in which he is destined to live.” Importantly: “For a post-modernist, the world does not possess values that have reality. He even has an expression for this: ‘the world as text,’ as something secondary, as the text of an author’s work, wherein the primary object of interest is the author himself in his relationship to the work, his own introspection.”

Yet, amazingly enough, throughout the past century growing numbers of people embraced the position Solshentisyn opposed and embraced the motto propounded in Luigi Pirandello’s 1916 play: *Right You Are If You Think You Are*. In their own inner worlds postmodernists fantasize—or “construct” their own reality—even to the extent of self-selecting their sex! New York City’s Mayor Bill de Blasio recently defended this, allowing residents to rewrite their birth certificates, choosing any of three sexual categories. “New Yorkers,” he said, “should be free to tell their government who they are.” Now boys insisting they are girls join female wrestling team and easily win matches. In such bizarre behaviors we see postmodernism triumphant! George Orwell, writing *1984*, envisioned such a time as ours, when: “All words grouping themselves round the concepts of objectivity and rationalism were contained in the single word *oldthink*.” He prophetically skewered the twin pillars of Postmodernism: epistemological skepticism and ethical relativism. What Orwell called “oldthink” (objective reason), postmodernists reject and claim to transcend.

In *Explaining Postmodernism: Skepticism and Socialism from Rousseau to Foucault*, Stephen R. C. Hicks says: “Postmodernism is the end result of the Counter-Enlightenment attack on reason.” So to understand it we need to review two centuries of intellectual history, beginning with Immanuel Kant, a philosopher often touted as the personification of the Enlightenment and its dedication to reason, yet who was deeply anti-rational inasmuch as he “asserted that the most important fact about reason is that it is clueless about reality” (#940). Kant thought we can observe and link together *phenomena*, but essences—any inner *noumena*—must remain forever unknowable. We can describe and manipulate the material world, but the “objects that science explores exist ‘only in our brain,’ so we can never come to know the world outside it” (#1075). Thus Kant discarded the Enlightenment’s understanding of reason, holding “that the mind is not a response mechanism but a constitutive mechanism. He held that the mind—and not reality—sets the terms for knowledge. And he held that reality conforms to reason, not vice versa. In the history of philosophy, Kant marks a fundamental shift from objectivity as the standard to subjectivity as the standard” (#1143). “‘I had to deny knowledge,’ wrote Kant in the Preface to the first Critique, ‘in order to make room for faith.’” Thus, as his “first hypothesis about the origins of postmodernism,” Hicks says: “*Postmodernism is the first ruthlessly consistent statement of the consequences of rejecting reason, those consequences being necessary given the history of epistemology since Kant.*”

Subsequent to Kant, various 19th century philosophers (e.g. Schopenhauer and Nietzsche) and theologians worked out the implications of his position. In particular there transpired a profound shift in Lutheran theology inspired by F.D.E. Schleiermacher, the father of Protestant Liberalism who declared: “‘The essence of religion is the feeling of absolute dependence. I repudiated rational thought in favour of a theology of feeling.’” Soon thereafter Soren Kierkegaard decreed that faith “‘requires the crucifixion of reason’; so he proceeded to crucify reason and glorify the irrational.” Equally Kantian is the atheistic version of Existentialism set forth by Martin Heidegger, who effectively jettisoned reason and logic “to make room for emotion.” Heidegger rejected “the entire Western tradition of philosophy . . . based as it is on the law of non-contradiction and the subject/object distinction” and propounded a despairing version of metaphysical nihilism. He “is unquestionably the leading twentieth-century philosopher for the postmodernists.”

In addition to Kant’s philosophical idealism one must understand the importance of Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s socialistic political ideology. Since the French Revolution in 1789, socialism (or progressivism) had become a Rousseau-rooted religion for many. He routinely elevated feeling over reason and determined to follow his “inner light;” he also celebrated the supremacy of simplicity (i.e. the “Noble Savage”) over the artificiality of civilization and its consequent corruptions. Consequently, some of the most influential postmodernists, awash in despair at the failure of their socialist faith, seem happy to envision the abolition of man. “God is dead, wrote Hegel and Nietzsche. Man too will be dead, Foucault hopes.” Deconstructionists, following the atheistic nihilism of Nietzsche, deconstruct not only language but Reality itself! Nothing can be said because, ultimately, nothing ontological is really *There*. If there are objective “things” (and especially all eternal, substantial, non-material realities) around us—they are beyond knowing and thus unreal. What’s real is simply what, at the moment, we consider real for us, whatever works for us. So here we are: men calling themselves women!