Identity Politics, the Post-Truth World and Constructivism

Gordon L. Anderson
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The bitter partisan divisions in American politics have several roots: political, economic and cultural.

In my 2009 book, *Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness, Version 4.0,* I explain a number of the political roots, like viruses, particularly through political parties, have hijacked the political system. The economic roots of the struggle essentially boil down to whether policies support an economy based on production for all (a win-win market economy) or taking from one group and giving it to another (a win-lose, hunter-gatherer economy).

This article focuses on the cultural roots of the struggle, looks at how deconstruction brought a crisis to post-modern thought, and considers whether a "constructivist" approach can overcome that crisis.

Several articles on the Applied Unificationism Blog have sought to understand the evolution of the idea of "truth." Dr. Keisuke Noda discussed (July 23, 2018) the correspondence theory of truth, coherence theory of truth, pragmatic approach to truth, existential approach to truth, linguistic approach to truth, and an integral approach to truth.

I followed up (March 11, 2019) with a discussion of how our level of consciousness affects the way in which we understand the truth. I showed a cultural development of theological consciousness, metaphysical consciousness and scientific consciousness in the study of scripture and also argued for an integral understanding of scriptural truth (inherited cultural narrative).

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The Death of Truth

However, we now find ourselves in a world where a significant part of society considers we are in a "post-truth world." The April 3, 2017 *TIME* magazine cover story, "Is Truth Dead?" was a replica of *TIME's* "Is God Dead?" cover story from April 8, 1966.

The parallels are striking. I remember when I was a student at UTS the notoriety and angst of Dr. Richard Rubenstein, an ordained rabbi, talking about "God is Dead." That angst can be viewed as arising from cognitive dissonance between inherited scriptural truth that the Jews were God's chosen people, and the deaths of over six million Jews in the Holocaust. Those, like Rubenstein, who confronted and worked through this seeming contradiction, did so by evolving their understanding of God, realizing that God was not dead, but their own former understanding of God (as all-powerful dictator) was dead and had to be replaced by a view of God who allows human beings freedom and responsibility. This view can be said to be an integration of the traditional view and stark contradiction posed by the Holocaust.

Today philosophers are discussing a similar crisis in post-modern thought. Is truth really dead? Or is contemporary post-modern thought at a level of consciousness below what is required to understand it? This is an important question if many in the media are not interested in truth before an election, but turn into propaganda organs for partisan narratives. After "deconstructing truth," many post-modernists are left with the arbitrary truth claims, values and norms promoted by identity groups. No universal truth seems possible to them. In that case, political policies are reduced to a power struggle between identity groups; and the idea of "good" policies or "bad policies" becomes relative and irrelevant. It's all about who can impose their group narrative (beliefs) on others.

Politics in a Post-Truth World

Ken Wilber, in *Trump and a Post-Truth World* (2017), was the first scholar, to my knowledge, to make the argument that the election of Donald Trump as president in 2016 was the result of the dysfunction and failure of the "post-truth culture" — the baby boomers, liberals, the environmentalists, globalists, and their post-modern social media groups. They had a consciousness at the level of the "green meme," which is "pre-integral" and unable to point a constructive way forward for the entire society. At this "green" stage of consciousness, post-modernists could see problems that the "orange" (modernist and capitalist) stages of society created, but they were unable to defend any value in traditional society and threw out the baby with the bathwater. This failure of liberalism, unable to offer anything but idealistic platitudes and

criticisms of current society, without a clear direction forward, opened the door to Trump's election.

The vehement and uncivil reaction to Trump's election further verified the post-modernist inability to think constructively. Unable to act gracefully, question what had gone wrong, or believe themselves responsible, they resorted to investigating, attacking, and discrediting Trump, rather than analyzing his policies or showing a way forward with metrics rather than hyperbole. When policies like the "Green New Deal" were put forward, they were so irrational as to appear as social suicide. Then the inability of these post-modern elites to condemn the violence, looting, and racism associated with the protests after George Floyd's death reflected an abandonment of the green meme principles of non-violence and cooperation and a reversion to a tribal (red) meme and a lower level of social consciousness than traditional (orange) conservatives.

New Post-Modern Religions

Some philosophers believe that post-modernism has entered a crisis similar to that which traditional religions faced with the rise of science. Before that, religions were social identity groups operating on beliefs based on their collective scriptures, norms and group values. The wars of religion in Europe before the Treaty of Westphalia (1648) parallel the post-modern culture wars of today in that they are wars of identity group narrative and belief. This tribalism of political parties and identity groups, which seeks to impose one group's norms and values on the entire society, reflects the pre-modern Muslim attempt to impose Sharia law, and certain fundamentalist Christians who believe their doctrines should become state law.

Most Americans and Europeans are moderns who have adjusted their traditional religious "truths" to the discoveries of science. The average person has somehow managed to practically integrate science and religion and move on with his or her life. However, one of the pathologies of post-modernism is that both traditional and scientific worldviews are considered to be "metanarratives" that need to be jettisoned.

But, in jettisoning traditional and modern norms, values and knowledge, there is nothing left but power, narcissism and new group narratives that appear as new "religious" doctrines. "Political correctness" looks like the official religious doctrine of post-modern university cultures.

John McWhorter, in an article in *The Atlantic,* argued that the new "third-wave anti-racism" has become America's newest religion, complete with doctrines, confession and a new original sin. Such post-modern religions, unmoored from traditional (pragmatic) and modern (scientific) truth, are rooted in highly unreliable emotion and feeling — sometimes noble feelings and sometimes reptilian. When "news" is viewed through the prisms of these identity group doctrines, it is seen as "fake news" by other groups. "News" thus becomes propaganda reminiscent of *Pravda* in the Soviet Union, and Westerners are having to learn to decipher what is the real truth by applying subconscious filters to what they hear in the media the way the Russians did.

Developmental Politics

There is a way beyond this "Death of Truth," just as there was a way beyond the "Death of God." A few scholars are beginning to find a way beyond the post-modern crisis. In his book, *Developmental Politics: How America Can Grow into a Better Version* (Paragon House, 2020), Steve McIntosh begins with the argument that hyperpolarization, if not war, between the two political parties in the United States is based on radically different group identities and narratives in U.S. politics. These narratives are limited and incomplete belief systems.
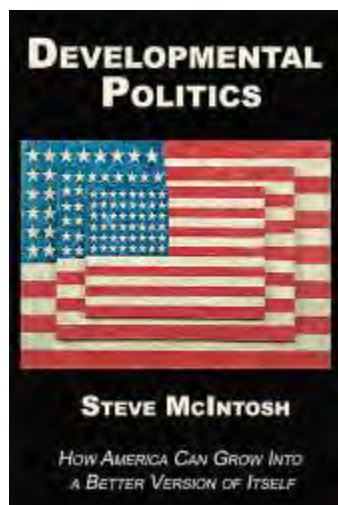
Mainstream culture is modernist and rooted in science with some respect for traditional liberal values. Traditional values that enabled society to evolve to modernist culture are part of the conservative political platform. Post-modern progressive values critique the negatives and pathologies of mainstream and conservative values without understanding that many of these values are necessary to sustain and grow society into a better form. McIntosh considers the identity politics we witness today as one of the "pathologies" of a post-modern worldview decoupled from the traditional and modern worldviews. After explaining the positive and negative values of each worldview, McIntosh argues that cultural evolution is an integration that enhances the positive values in each worldview and constrains the negative pathologies of each.

Modernist Values	
Positives	*Negatives*
Individual Liberty	Environmental degradation
Human Rights	Economic injustice
Rule of Law	Nuclear Proliferation
Economic and Scientific Progress	
Achievement and Prosperity	

Traditional Values	
Positives	*Negatives*
Loyalty to God, Family, Country	Racism
Duty and personal responsibility	Sexism
Self-sacrifice	Authoritarianism

Post-Modernist Progressive Values	
Positives	*Negatives*
Environmental care	Anti-modernism
Diversity and inclusion	Unpatriotic
Social justice	Divisive identity politics
	Self-righteous scolding
	Tyrannical demands

Constructivism

McIntosh's process of integration of values parallels the "constructivism" that has emerged recently. In her article in the edited book, *International Relations Theory,* Sarina Theys, citing political scientist Alexander Wendt, explains constructivism as follows:

Alexander Wendt (1995) offers an excellent example that illustrates the social construction of reality when he explains that 500 British nuclear weapons are less threatening to the United States than five North Korean nuclear weapons. These identifications are not caused by the nuclear weapons (the material structure) but rather by the meaning given to the material structure (the ideational structure). It is important to understand that the social relationship between the United States and Britain and the United States and North Korea is perceived in a similar way by these states, as this shared understanding (or intersubjectivity) forms the basis of their interactions. The example also shows that nuclear weapons by themselves do not have any meaning unless we understand the social context. It further demonstrates that constructivists go beyond the material reality by including the effect of ideas and beliefs on world politics.

Constructivism has been adopted by some Chinese scholars like Yaqing Qin. Drawing on the *yin* and *yang* in Taoism, there are parallels in this view to the Unification Thought idea that Hegel's dialectic is not resolved through struggle, but through constructive give and take action. McIntosh makes a similar critique of the Marxist-Leninist use of Hegel's dialectic, arguing that "synthesis" is not the victory of one group over the other, but an integration of the good of each.

Further, constructivism in the study of Chinese international relations theory is often tied to another relatively new field in social theory called "civilizational analysis." Chinese scholars tie the idea of protecting "civilization," which includes Chinese social norms and values, from destruction by anarchy and states with less civilized values. Ironically, President Xi Jinping, whose primary concern may be promoting Chinese civilization values, has appeared to others — by burning churches and interning Uighurs — as using power to promote the values of a specific identity group by force. This is not viewed as civilized behavior and in contradiction to a constructive civilizational approach to international relations. In McIntosh's view, while Xi would be right to reclaim traditional values, his actions also reveal the negative side of traditional values.

Conclusion

I propose that we work on developing an integrationist or constructivist approach that salvages the philosophical quest for truth from the wreckage of deconstructionism in post-modern thought. Such an approach would resonate with McIntosh's call to integrate the positive values of the traditional, modern and post-modern approaches to Western civilization, and it would also resonate with a constructive civilizational approach advocated by 21st century Chinese scholars.

Further, I argue that, on the intercultural level, Eastern and Western values are also incomplete worldviews and constructive integration of the Eastern values of loyalty, piety and personal responsibility coupled with the freedom and human rights values in the West would serve as a corrective to 1) the pathologies of post-modernism ripping apart U.S. society, and, 2) the heavy-handed authoritarian tactics endemic in the East.

Finally, I continue to maintain that the cultural sphere is just one of three social spheres, in the "subject position," centering on love. However, it must recognize that the primary principle of the sphere of governance is force of law and it needs a measure of autonomy. Also, it must recognize the primary principle of the economy is production and exchange, which also needs a measure of autonomy. Thus, a constructive integration of the cultural sphere should be further integrated with the political and economic spheres in a fully developmental society.

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Graphic at Top: Comparison of *TIME magazine's covers from 1966 (left) and 2017.*