

dialogue between postmodernism and the Catholic tradition is ongoing and has already borne copious fruit.

SEE ALSO DECONSTRUCTIONISM; DIFFERENCE; LOGOCENTRISM; REALISM; RELATIVISM.

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POST-STRUCTURALISM

The terms *structuralism* and *post-structuralism* both refer to a political, literary, and aesthetic expansion of CONTINENTAL PHILOSOPHY that developed in the second half of the twentieth century in a fashion parallel to certain developments in analytic philosophy. The post-structural approach is known for its efforts to offer a critical review of normative concepts in classical philosophy, and it makes use of the LINGUISTIC TURN (i.e., the reevaluation of language in theories of KNOWLEDGE), PHENOMENOLOGY, and HERMENEUTICS alike.

As the term *post-structuralism* suggests, its representatives have been formed especially through critical discussion with structuralists, such as Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913), Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908–2009),

and the so-called Russian formalists. Among the most important representatives of post-structuralist philosophy are Jacques Derrida (1930–2004), Gilles Deleuze (1925–1995), Jean-François Lyotard (1924–1998), Jacques Lacan (1901–1981), Michel Foucault (1926–1984), and Slavoj Žižek and his school. Though many of the representatives have French backgrounds, their theories have had influence all over the world, especially in the areas of philosophy of language, ETHICS, NEOPRAGMATISM, literary theory, and gender studies. In the United States, the works of Richard Rorty (1931–2007) and Judith Butler are often associated with post-structuralism. What distinguishes structuralism from post-structuralism is not always easy to identify, but as a general rule post-structuralists see their theories as based on structuralism's philosophy of language (Saussure) and anthropology (Lévi-Strauss), but they apply those insights to a wider range of topics and radicalize some of structuralism's premises.

Post-structuralists differ among themselves in their specific approaches, for some proceed historically, some hermeneutically. In addition, some base their work on discourse analysis, and others combine critical theory with psychoanalysis. If there is a basic subject matter that connects these authors in addition to their use of the linguistic turn, it is the influence of phenomenology as found in the works of Edmund HUSSERL (1859–1938) and Martin HEIDEGGER (1889–1976).

Important Post-Structuralists. Key figures include Foucault, Žižek, and Derrida, who is the most celebrated proponent of post-structuralist thought. Although Heidegger worked in phenomenology and not in structuralism, his thought is the essential reference point for Derrida, whose theory of deconstruction was inspired by what Heidegger calls the "destruction" of philosophy's tradition.

From Heidegger to Derrida. For many post-structuralists, Heidegger's *Being and Time* has been understood as a critique of a tradition of philosophical REALISM that goes back to PLATO's (c. 428/427–348/347 BC) understanding of BEING as a universal and stable entity that guarantees that general terms can function predicatively in a true subject-predicate sentence. Heidegger questioned the very notion of TRUTH as something that could be determined through such UNIVERSALS. He regarded truth claims to be misperceived when understood as correlated with a horizon of everlasting (godlike) meanings untouched by time. Heidegger tried to recast truth as a phenomenological quest based on experience rather than on a priori concepts. In *Being and Time* he articulates the need for a destruction of traditional philosophical thinking by going back to the "initial experiences" (*ursprüngliche Er-*

fahrungen) from which conceptual thought nourishes itself. The task of “going back” is supposed to not only make individuals understand where their thinking and their categories come from, but to let them see that philosophical thinking tends to conceal its own answers. For Heidegger, the origin of philosophical thinking always stands in opposition to thinking itself, understood as a discourse that proceeds through binary oppositions of positive and negative (e.g., the distinction between the true and the false). Thus, Heidegger believed that he had to go back to the historical beginnings of philosophy, even before Plato, so as to counter Plato’s influence in Western philosophy.

Derrida took up Heidegger’s call for a philosophical destruction (questioning) of traditional categories and made the case that this destruction is already at work in any philosophical text. This thesis is the foundation of his theory of deconstruction, which he sees as a hermeneutical method that tries to find in philosophical texts, and especially in their margins, what eludes conceptual notions. Derrida urges that inner-conceptual contradictions invariably have to be suppressed by texts as their authors work to establish various truth claims (Derrida 1972). Deconstruction is his name for the art of reading by which one finds the cracks and fractures in one’s thinking and self-understanding. Many of Derrida’s interpretations of canonical texts in Western philosophy aim at exhibiting how many games can be found in human language. In this respect Derrida’s thought is like that of Ludwig WITTGENSTEIN (1889–1951), whose *Philosophical Investigations* also argued against the idea of language as communicating facts that could serve as the logical basis of truth claims. For both Derrida and Wittgenstein, no language game constitutes the core of language and logic; no one language game can be the origin of all others.

Truth In or Beyond Semantics? The realist branch of analytic philosophy sees meaning as a semantic independent entity that can be defined through objective procedures of truth-value analysis in sentences. For thinkers in this tradition, truth is “not a property of sentences or thoughts, as language might lead one to suppose” (Frege 1979, 234). In post-structuralist epistemology, on the contrary, meaning depends on the inferential network of language, which spreads along the whole chain of signifiers into ever-new differences and conceptual insights. Meaning simultaneously “is” and “is not”—it is there, and it is always to come; it is ever the result of a particular process of division and subdivision of signs that receive their identity by reference to the entire network of signs. Signifiers cannot exist in isolation but rather are dependent on a system within which they must be deciphered. Meaning thus proves to be eccentric, for it cannot be determined once and for all

in any one epistemology. There is something unstable about meaning itself. Derrida calls each system of thought that tries to resist such INDETERMINACY of truth-values? or meaning “metaphysical” and “logocentric” (in a negative sense). He thinks it erroneous to understand meaning as contingent upon concept-independent facts, as if one could look through epistemology to an epistemology-independent reality, or to fundamental principles, or to an indisputable basis on which a whole hierarchy of meaning could then be built from the bottom up. For Derrida, as well as for Deleuze and Lyotard, the meaning of any given expression can never remain identical with itself, and each new dialectical cognitive process presents itself as an ever-postponed fulfillment to come. This last point can explain the importance Derrida attaches to CRITICAL THEORY and literary theory. In the humanities, post-structuralism has triggered many polemical debates where some critics see it as a sophisticated form of NIHILISM and RELATIVISM.

Critics of post-structuralism tend to argue that the world consists of entities, such as objects with various properties and relations between them. These entities exist independently of one’s knowledge of them. For such critics, to understand truth only semantically leads to self-contradiction, and in their view, even an ideal epistemological theory could still be wrong. Truth must therefore be understood metaphysically, as the correspondence between semantically independent facts and a PROPOSITION. According to a realist philosophical position, it is not language that makes a JUDGMENT objectively true but the objective conditions of reality, and realist philosophers hold that language can reflect (instantiate) this reality. Derrida’s philosophy is opposed to this view. For him, meaning shifts because of a fundamental difference (*differance*) that undermines every necessary binary structure of conceptual thought. It is this difference that deprives every conceptual definition of the chance to find stability in relation to some absolute truth-value or truth-maker. The debate reflects, in some sense, the disparity between the philosophies of Immanuel KANT (1724–1804) and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich HEGEL (1770–1831) in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, as well as the disparity between Willard Van Orman Quine (1908–2000) and the logical POSITIVISM of the VIENNA CIRCLE in the 1950s.

Michel Foucault. The transition from structuralism to post-structuralism is also reflected in the work of Michel Foucault, and especially in his method of genealogy. Among his various historical (genealogical) works, *The Order of Things* and *The Birth of the Clinic* stand out. Foucault tried to develop a new understanding of historical developments as processes of rupture, deviation, and contingency. Although his research area was not

philosophy of language or hermeneutics but history, he can still be regarded as a post-structuralist insofar as he understands history not as a matter of what subjects do but as a process of almost subject-independent discourses. These discourses appear in his interpretation as gravitational fields in which humankind is somehow entrapped. In contrast to a traditional understanding of historical events, his view of history allows for no rule-directed or teleological processes. Rather, history is essentially characterized by constant changes and by the reorganization of various discourses and their practices. History so interpreted is not determined by moncausal sequences of large events (wars, disasters, etc.), nor is it animated by the actions of individuals (emperors, kings, popes, the people, etc.). Instead, Foucault examines the constitutive processes of certain types of knowledge (e.g. surveillance, punishment, hygiene) as the moving forces in the respective periods that he studies.

Foucault examines various areas of knowledge in the humanities and shows how their knowledge procedures (administration, education, classification) conceive the human subject. History, at least in an early work such as *The Order of Things*, is a process piloted not by individuals but by the order of discourse that constitutes (almost accidentally as a necessary by-product) subjects in dependence to these discourse processes and their categories. Discourse is not a tool of individuals but the frame within which subjects emerge. Going back to Friedrich NIETZSCHE's (1844–1900) concept of a "genealogy of morals," Foucault reflects some of the central themes of post-structuralistic thought: a criticism of philosophical realism; a questioning of the Western subject, who is decentered by the very language-frame within which he is constituted; and a critique of history as rational totality. Just as for Heidegger people are subject to language, for Foucault they are subject to administrative powers. Exposing these networks of interacting relationships between knowledge, language games, political power, and administration is what Foucault calls "archaeology." In this post-structuralist perspective, power is no longer guaranteed by a single subject, the sovereign or the elected government, but is dispersed more and more into modern biopolitical expert administrations where the border between private and public life seems ever-more indistinguishable. Foucault is interested in this nexus of knowledge and power; in his later works he calls this "biopolitics." This is his focus when he considers the system of mental illness, the criminal justice system, biopolitical delinquency, or sexuality.

Slavoj Žižek. This Slovenian philosopher is one of the leading figures of contemporary post-structuralistic thought, even though he repeatedly criticizes the epistemic premises of post-structuralist philosophy,

especially in regard to the philosophy of subjectivity. Inspired by the works of Alain Badiou, Žižek has become famous for propagating Lacan's psychoanalysis and introducing it into philosophy and cultural studies. Žižek's writings revolve around the question of identity and its interpellation by the symbolic networks of political and social institutions that act on the subject's unconscious. These interpellations can have a deeply enigmatic nature, but they exert a decisive influence on the development of the subject's most intimate desires and aspirations. Žižek's work focuses on the philosophical aspects of Lacanian theory and leaves the clinical dimensions of psychoanalysis aside. His reception of Lacan is therefore based on a separation of psychoanalysis from its ancestral medical context. This approach has contributed to his reputation, and his numerous publications are influential in a variety of disciplines, including the philosophy of the subject, critical theory, and psychoanalysis.

Žižek describes being a subject along the lines of Lacan and Hegel as a process of constant struggle to react to the various identifications and (enigmatic) appeals that are presented to the subject from birth on. For Žižek, following the investigations of Louis Althusser (1918–1990), the subject is necessarily subject to ideological interpellation. Being a subject means always being subjected, and thus ideological. Hence, the ideological appeal succeeds as a condition of the constitution of subjects. Culture and politics as the normative frameworks in which subjects interact always maintain their normative claims with the help of techniques of idealization, homogenization, and the repression of internal antagonisms. These techniques are of interest for Žižek, since they generally tend to defend the political status quo and to reduce anxiety over new political (radical) options. For Žižek, living with these idealizations as unquestioned, fact-establishing certainties means underestimating the political potentialities of the subject, who is capable of setting the same techniques against what the established political doxa (rule) defines as fact.

SEE ALSO DECONSTRUCTIONISM; SEMANTICS; STRUCTURALISM.

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PRACTICAL ETHICS

SEE *Applied Ethics*.

PRAGMATIC THEORY OF TRUTH

There is no one pragmatic theory of truth, just as there is no one essence of PRAGMATISM as a philosophical movement. Still, it is possible to point to some basic themes, emphases, and figures. Pragmatist accounts of truth are both critique of and advancement beyond opposing sides of historically dominant truth theories, particularly with respect to the so-called correspondence and coherence theories of truth. Appearing in the work of philosophers from PLATO (429–347 BC) and ARISTOTLE (384–322 BC) to THOMAS AQUINAS (1225–1274), René DESCARTES (1596–1650), and many others since then, truth has often been said to consist in the “correspondence” between PROPOSITION and fact in the world, and this has indeed been a quite popular view and one associated with various traditional kinds of REALISM. Conversely, appearing in the work of Baruch SPINOZA (1632–1677), Immanuel KANT (1724–1804), Johann Gottlieb FICHTE (1762–1814), Georg Wilhelm Friedrich HEGEL (1770–1831), and Brand Blanshard (1892–1987), among others, truth is sometimes considered to consist in the coherence between propositions themselves, a view associated with various

traditional kinds of IDEALISM. Pragmatists take a quite different approach.

To such legacies, pragmatist philosophers respond that one does not have special access to an unchanging set of facts by which to measure one's judgments. Rather, human knowledge is mediated by a diversity of interpretations and descriptions. There is no way to completely extract oneself from one's web of beliefs (see Willard Van Orman QUINE [1908–2000]) to compare them with some ontologically independent reality. With the correspondence theory maintaining that the nature of truth is a correspondence to such facts—facts that by their very being are closed to human beings—one presumably cannot and shall not have knowledge of a given judgment being absolutely true. Pragmatists thus reject the notion of absolute Truth (note the capital “T”), for they do not qua pragmatists make metaphysical claims about how the world really is apart from experiencers.

Traditional theories—both the theories of correspondence and of coherence—are viewed as badly misguided for assuming that some essential truth-property exists about which one could theorize. This is so in large part because pragmatism assumes that there are in fact many truths, and that truth is by its nature objectively plural. It should be added that pragmatists are not alone in this. Such anti-essentialism is shared in various and divergent ways with philosophers of other twentieth-century philosophical traditions: for example, Ludwig WITTGENSTEIN (1889–1951), and, more recently, Michael Dummett (1925–2011) of the analytic tradition, along with Martin HEIDEGGER (1889–1976), Michel Foucault (1926–1984), Jacques Derrida (1930–2004), and Jürgen Habermas of the so-called Continental tradition. One might say that pragmatists seek to bridge the gap between the correspondence theory and the coherence theory; thus, pragmatism serves as a mediator between realism and idealism, but one that rejects the essentialism of both.

This rejection of traditional truth theories has inspired some thinkers (e.g., Thomists) to criticize pragmatism as crude relativism or despairing skepticism. Yet (with the possible exception of Richard Rorty [1931–2007]) this is not the case, for the traditional correspondence theory of truth can be associated with metaphysical realism but, being antirealistic, conceive of truth in terms of “warranted assertibility,” to use John Dewey's phrase. Although he was reluctant to engage in too much explicit “truth talk,” Dewey (1859–1952) offers, with other classical pragmatists, a clear account consistent of truth as provisional and as a function of inquiry. Truth is simply a function of what one is warranted to assert on the basis of inquiry—and different inquiries can lead to different objective truths.