

## POSTMODERN THEORY AND ITS TWO MAJOR SELF-DECEPTIONS

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'Postmodernism' has been, beyond any doubt, one of the most frequently used terms in human sciences in the last three decades. Yet, its meaning remains a matter of dispute, open for different, sometimes indeed, conflicting interpretations. Although its impact on contemporary social theory needs no further systematic critical examination in this paper, its influence on social practice has yet to be judged in future investigations. This is partly because the very term itself is logically problematic (modern = present moment, up-to-date, now; postmodern = after now, future). Not only is it impossible to make a systematic science of the future (a not-yet-existing realm!), but postmodernism itself is orientated precisely to the past, not the future. For in its strictest sense, the term denies the very possibility of any plausible analysis or predicament of the future. Moreover, the term 'postmodernism' is of rather low informational content. Taken literally, it simply refers to the vague and general notion of "aftermath," having no specific meaning of its own. It is based on something else and is derived from the character of a temporal attitude toward another temporally defined phenomenon called *moderna* or 'modernism.' Thus, any 'postmodern' analysis is *per definitionem* to be located in relation to the 'modern'—whatever it might be. This consideration determines the choice of strategy for our present investigation.

In spite of some significant differences and, more often than not, even confrontation among postmodernist thinkers concerning specific problems, there is unanimity on two major points: (1) that historically, with regard to its origin, postmodernism was primarily shaped by the adoption of Nietzsche's and Heidegger's philosophical ideas, as well as by the rejection of methodological suggestions offered by Husserl's phenomenology; (2) that in relation to its main inspiration (*spiritus movens*),

postmodern thought is generally defined as an extremely radical position.

However, both of these commonly shared beliefs are incorrect and cannot be defended for two reasons. Firstly, careful reading and proper understanding of Nietzsche, Heidegger and Husserl clearly shows that such beliefs, with respect to the postmodern viewpoint, are among its colossal self-deceptions, and with respect to the viewpoint of its critical reception, it is simply a misunderstanding. Neither Nietzsche nor Heidegger can be consistently interpreted in the light of postmodern thought, nor can their basic statements be understood inside the postmodern analytic framework. Secondly, postmodern approach is not at all radical; rather, it is directly opposed to the very idea of radicalism in theory, science, methodology, as well as in any form of social practice.

Methodologically, this research focuses on three segments; (1) history of the term, development of its meaning, usage and theoretical application in (2) the philosophical investigation of its basic statements and logical consistency, in order to create conditions for (3) a critical evaluation of the character of postmodernism and the role it plays in contemporary Western thought. Segments (2) and (3) have not been observed by the representatives of postmodernism nor by their most radical critics. The central thesis of this paper is, therefore, that the rise and the development of postmodernism is based on two major self-deceptions: (1) that concerning its origin, and (2) that concerning its basic meaning. We shall start by following chronologically the earliest traces of the usage of the term and the emanations of what we may rightly call the *postmodern mentality*.

### *Anamnesis or the History of Postmodernism*

Contrary to practically all interpretations which point to the time from the late 17th to 19th centuries as the period during which the so-called "modern ethos" was initially formulated, careful analysis of the history of ideas puts this period several centuries earlier. In his famous speech delivered at the *Universitas Sorbon-*