The Vacuity of Postmodernist Methodology.

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Abstract: Many of the philosophical doctrines purveyed by postmodernists have been roundly refuted, yet people continue to be taken in by the dishonest devices used in proselytizing for postmodernism. I exhibit, name and analyse five favourite rhetorical manoeuvres: Troll's Truisms, Motte and Bailey Doctrines, Equivocating Fulcra, the Postmodernist Fox-trot and Rankly Relativising Fields. Anyone familiar with postmodernist writing will recognise their pervasive hold on the dialectic of postmodernism, and come to judge that dialectic as it ought to be judged.

Many of the philosophical doctrines purveyed by postmodernists have been roundly refuted, yet people continue to be taken in by a set of dishonest devices used in proselytizing for postmodernism. It is getting tiring to repeat refutations of the same type for each new appearance of these various manoeuvres. For this reason, then, rather than yet another set of specific refutations, I offer you instead my little museum of their rhetorical manoeuvres, each exhibit neatly labelled, each label inscribed with a name, each name adding to a vocabulary of dismissal.

By "postmodernists" I mean not just self appellating postmodernists such as Lyotard and Rorty, but also post-structuralists, deconstructivists, exponents of the strong programme in the sociology of knowledge, and feminist anti-rationalists. I unite them under the term because, philosophically, they are united by a sceptical doctrine about rationality (which they mistake for a profound discovery): namely, that rationality cannot be an objective constraint on us, but is just whatever we make it, and what we make it depends on what we value. Opponents are held to disguise their self-interested construction of rationality behind a metaphysically inflated view of rationality in which Reason-with-a-capital-R is supposed to transcend the merely empirical selves of rational beings.

Let us name this sceptical doctrine. How about "logophobia"? It has much to recommend it. Patronising, question-begging, pre-emptive of further thought, ensuring easy evasion of the merely Gradgrindian question of the truth or falsity of the doctrine, so

permitting us to move on swiftly to the fun of abusing logophobics. What more could one want from a term?

Alas, I am a dogged rationalist, and have renounced the pleasures of sophistical trickery. Instead I have named the doctrine "alogosia" to convey its denial of reason's objectivity, and its purveyors "alogosists", of which postmodernists are only the most recent. I am not going to discuss that doctrine here, but I may exploit some of its absurdities.

One way I might have exploited it is to make use of ad hominem argument. Although tu quoque ad hominem can be a legitimate objection, merely abusive ad hominem is fallacious, for which reason rationalists are required to reject it. But if you are a rationalist you are already among the converted, and I think I will give you enough in terms that you (and I) accept.

If, however, you are an alogosist, the situation is quite different. For the alogosist sophistry is no less valid than sound argument, indeed, there is no such distinction to be made. I am happy to speak to postmodernists in their own terms. A good rhetorical trouncing of postmodernism, however sophistical, is something a postmodernist should be persuaded by. Indeed, in the face of such a trouncing they would then be impaled on the horns of a dilemma: If they reject it for being sophistry they acknowledge that their position is ill founded, for such complaints can only be made from a prior acceptance of precisely the robust rationality which it is my wider purpose to defend from their scepticism. If they accept it, its conclusion is that postmodernism should be renounced. Either way, they reject postmodernism.

What remains, then, is absolute irrationalism, which I discuss later, or a rejection on aesthetic grounds: the trouncing is perhaps insufficiently amusingly rude, insufficiently cleverly sophistical. Here, I think, is the origin of the literary snobbery one finds in postmodernism. It is a concession that adherence to postmodernism is more a matter of taste than anything else, a matter of the rejection of the rude, the unsophisticated, in short, a rejection of the peasant. I do not mind being condescended to in these terms by those postmodernists who have so bravely sought to enlighten me from my dull rationalism – although I will endeavour in future to be more cleverly sophistical, or perhaps just being ruder will do. In the meantime, I think it will be clear to the reader which passages are written in a liberatory postmodern spirit and which are written by means of malicious and oppressive uses of rationality.

OK. Enough of such fun. Let's turn to my manoeuvres about their manoeuvres.

Troll's Truisms.

The first exhibit is the use of what I shall call "Troll's Truisms". A Troll's Truism is a mildly ambiguous statement by which an exciting falsehood may trade on a trivial truth. A typical example of a Troll's Truism is the statement that anything constructed could be constructed differently. This particular truism I think of as being, for postmodernists, the ur-truism from the ur-troll. On this postmodernists have built what they have taken to be a radical critique of rationality. The exciting falsehoods that can trade here are the notions that what we know, what the truth is, and how the world is, are constructed by us and so arbitrary: the trivial truths merely that we construct our beliefs, we construct meaning and act on the world on the basis of our beliefs. Prescinding from the question of truth bearers, obviously, which statements are true depends on what the sentence used in an utterance means, which in turn depends on how we have constructed meaning. As postmodernists have proved, there is plenty of room for manipulating meaning tendentiously, but we are not thereby manipulating the world. There also comes the point at which having

constructed a meaning differently we have no longer constructed the same thing. Of course, we can use the same word, but we are no longer speaking of the same thing. We shall see an example of this shortly.

When used thus to assert social constructivism the truism insinuates the notion that there is no objectivity without ever arguing for it, yet permits a retreat to the trivial truth whenever pressed by an opponent on the exciting falsehood. A beautiful example of this is Stanley Fish's defence to the exposure of postmodernist nonsense in the Sokal affair. In his paper Sokal asserted explicitly a number of standard doctrines of postmodernism. Social constructivism denies that there is "an external world, whose properties are independent of any human being and indeed of humanity as a whole" (Sokal 1996). In the book "The Sokal Hoax" Stanley Fish performs the retreat to the trivial truth as follows

> What sociologists of science say is that of course the world is real and independent of our observations but that accounts of the world are produced by observers and are therefore relative to their capacities, education, training, etc. It is not the world or its properties but the vocabularies in whose terms we know them that are socially constructed – fashioned by human beings – which is why our understanding of those properties is continually changing. (Fish 1996)

One of the first examples of exactly this move is the title of Berger and Luckmann *The Social Construction of Reality* (1967) contrasted with their early remark in the book that of course, what they mean is not the social construction of reality but of belief.

Motte and Bailey Doctrines.

Troll's Truisms are used to insinuate an exciting falsehood, which is a desired doctrine, yet permit retreat to the trivial truth when pressed by an opponent. In so doing they exhibit a property which makes them the simplest possible case of what I shall call a Motte and Bailey Doctrine(since a doctrine can single belief or an entire body of beliefs).

A Motte and Bailey castle is a medieval system of defence in which a stone tower on a mound (the Motte) is surrounded by an area of land (the Bailey) which in turn is encompassed by some sort of a barrier such as a ditch. Being dark and dank, the Motte is not a habitation of choice. The only reason for its existence is the desirability of the Bailey, which the combination of the Motte and ditch makes relatively easy to retain despite attack by marauders. When only lightly pressed, the ditch makes small numbers of attackers easy to defeat as they struggle across it: when heavily pressed the ditch is not defensible and so neither is the Bailey. Rather one retreats to the insalubrious but defensible, perhaps impregnable, Motte. Eventually the marauders give up, when one is well placed to reoccupy desirable land.

For my purposes the desirable but only lightly defensible territory of the Motte and Bailey castle, that is to say, the Bailey, represents a philosophical doctrine or position with similar properties: desirable to its proponent but only lightly defensible. The Motte is the defensible but undesired position to which one retreats when hard pressed. I think it is evident that Troll's Truisms have the Motte and Bailey property, since the exciting falsehoods constitute the desired but indefensible region within the ditch whilst the trivial truth constitutes the defensible but dank Motte to which one may retreat when pressed.

An entire doctrine or theory may be a Motte and Bailey Doctrine just by virtue of having a central core of defensible but not terribly interesting or original doctrines surrounded by a region of exciting but only lightly defensible doctrines. Just as the medieval Motte was often constructed by the stonemasons art from stone in the

surrounding land, the Motte of dull but defensible doctrines is often constructed by the use of the sophists art from the desired but indefensible doctrines lying within the ditch.

Diagnosis of a philosophical doctrine as being a Motte and Bailey Doctrine is invariably fatal. Once made it is relatively obvious to those familiar with the doctrine that the doctrine's survival required a systematic vacillation between exploiting the desired territory and retreating to the Motte when pressed.

The dialectic between many refutations of specific postmodernist doctrines and the postmodernist defences correspond exactly to the dynamics of Motte and Bailey Doctrines. When pressed with refutation the postmodernists retreat to their Mottes, only to venture out and repossess the desired territory when the refutation is not in immediate evidence. For these reasons, I think the proper diagnosis of postmodernism is precisely that it is a Motte and Bailey Doctrine. I do not have time to defend that rather large claim in detail here. Rather, we are going to look at some examples. I hope that for those familiar with postmodernism as a whole, seeing the mechanism laid bare in a few cases will suffice to make evident the larger truth.

Foucault as Humpty Dumpty

So a Motte and Bailey Doctrine is a Troll's Truism writ large: indeed, Motte and Bailey Doctrines are often constructed out of nothing more than a set of Troll's Truisms; but that need not be the case. They can be established by the use of a very simple device: arbitrary redefinition, which manoeuvre, after Lewis Carroll, is often called Humpty Dumptying. Much as I would enjoy quoting the entire passage, since it seems to me that in Humpty Dumpty's remarks and demeanour Carroll captures perfectly the mode of discourse of postmodernists when engaged in this manoeuvre, I shall confine myself to the strictly relevant parts.

> "I don't know what you mean by "glory,"" Alice said.
>
> Humpty Dumpty smiled contemptuously. "Of course you don't—till I tell you. I meant "there's a nice knock-down argument for you!'"
>
> "But "glory" doesn't mean "a nice knockdown argument,'" Alice objected.
>
> "When *I* use a word," Humpty Dumpty said in rather a scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less."
>
> "The question is," said Alice, "whether you *can* make words mean different things."
>
> "The question is," said Humpty Dumpty, "which is to be master—that's all."
> (Carroll 1962, 74-5)

And of course, we *are* the masters, only we can't pretend that having redefined "glory" to mean "a nice knockdown argument" that we are continuing to speak of glory when using the word. But that is precisely what arbitrary redefinition permits.

Let us now turn to Foucault's theory identifying truth and power. Here is an example of the exciting ground lying within the Bailey:

> In societies like ours, the "political economy" of truth is characterised by five important traits. Truth is centred on the form of scientific discourse and the institutions which produce it; it is subject to constant economic and political incitement. (Foucault 1972, 131)

The essential political problem for the intellectual is not to criticise the ideological contents supposedly linked to science, or to ensure that his own scientific practice is accompanied by a correct ideology, but that of ascertaining the possibility of constituting a new politics of truth. The problem is not changing people's consciousnesses – or what's in their heads – but the political, economic, institutional regime of the production of truth....

It's not a matter of emancipating truth from every system of power (which would be a chimera, for truth is already power) but of detaching the power of truth from the forms of hegemony, social, economic and cultural, within which it operates at the present time.

The political question, to sum up, is not error, illusion, alienated consciousness or ideology; it is truth itself. Hence the importance of Nietzsche. (Foucault 1972, 133)

And here is Foucault's Humpty Dumptying by which the Motte may be constructed from the material in the Bailey.

"Truth" is to be understood as a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation and operation of statements. (Foucault 1972, 132)

Well if *that* is how truth is to be understood, all those exciting statements about truth lose their glamour — they are true but mundane. Just go through the passage, crossing out truth and substituting "a system of ordered procedures for the production... of statements" and you can see the boring Motte to which Foucault may retreat:

In societies like ours, the "political economy" of -- ~~truth~~ a system of ordered procedures for the production... of statements -- is characterised by five important traits. --"~~truth~~ a system of ordered procedures for the production... of statements -- is centred on the form of scientific discourse and the institutions which produce it; it is subject to constant economic and political incitement

The essential political problem for the intellectual is not to criticise the ideological contents supposedly linked to science, or to ensure that his own scientific practice is accompanied by a correct ideology, but that of ascertaining the possibility of constituting a new politics of --"~~truth~~" a system of ordered procedures for the production... of statements --. The problem is not changing people's consciousnesses ‒ or what's in their heads ‒ but the political, economic, institutional regime of the production of --"~~truth~~" a system of ordered procedures for the production... of statements --.

It's not a matter of emancipating --"~~truth~~" a system of ordered procedures for the production... of statements --from every system of power (which would be a chimera, for --"~~truth~~" a system of ordered procedures for the production... of statements --is already power) but of detaching the power of --"~~truth~~" a system of ordered procedures for the production... of statements --from the forms of hegemony, social, economic and cultural, within which it operates at the present time.

> The political question, to sum up, is not error, illusion, alienated con-
> sciousness or ideology; it is --"truth" a system of ordered procedures for the
> production… of statements --itself.

Suddenly the glamour of paradoxical profundities such as "[the] regime of truth… is not merely ideological… it was a condition of the …development of capitalism" evaporates and we are left with rather mundane observations about social institutions without gaining any insight into why some social institutions might be more truth conducive than others. The upshot of this Humpty-Dumptying is a puerile and pernicious scepticism about the possibility of knowledge.

It may be objected that rather than redefining the word "truth", Foucault is here enunciating a pragmatic *theory* of truth: *P* is true iff *P* is the product of a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation and operation of statements. For brevity, let us state this as "*P* is true iff *P* is socially manufactured". Admittedly, it is not a standard pragmatic theory (*P* is true iff *P* is useful to believe), since there is no guarantee that such socially manufactured beliefs *will* be useful. Nevertheless, truth is being considered as a property that attaches to beliefs purely as a consequence of the use or role those beliefs play in our lives, not in there being any independent sense in which the content of the beliefs might correspond with the world, and so this would be a pragmatic theory.

If Foucault is enunciating a theory of truth, rather than merely redefining the word "truth" then a correct understanding of Tarski's material adequacy condition[1] shows it to be a false theory. The material adequacy condition is not a definition of truth, but just a condition on what it is for any definition or theory of truth to be a satisfactory definition or theory. What makes a definition materially adequate is that it specifies the extension of the predicate "… is true" in such a way as to satisfy the material adequacy condition. As given in "The semantic theory of truth" (Tarski 1943)

> We shall call any such equivalence
>
> (T) *X* is true if and only if *p*.
>
> (with "*p*" replaced by any sentence of the language to which the word true refers, and "*X*" replaced by a name of this sentence) an *"equivalence of the form* (T)."
>
> Now at last we are able to put into a precise form the conditions under which we will consider the usage and the definition of the term true as adequate from the material point of view: we wish to use the term "true" in such a way that all equivalencies of the form (T) can be asserted, and we shall call a definition of truth "adequate" if all these equivalencies follow from it. (1943, 195)

Tarski is saying that for a theory to count as a theory of truth (rather than anything else) it must be materially adequate in this way (at least), which is to say that it is necessary for

all equivalencies of the form (T) to be theorems of the theory. So for example, any theory of truth for English must include amongst its theorems:

- "Snow is white" is true iff snow is white
- "Snow is blue" is true iff snow is blue
- "Sheep sleep greenly" is true iff sheep sleep greenly
- "Sheep sleep soundly" is true iff sheep sleep soundly

Hence whenever anybody claims to be giving us a theory of truth we can simply append to their theory all equivalencies of that form and examine their theory for consistency and absurdity in the light of the presence of those equivalencies.

Let us apply this to Foucault's theory. To evade complications of tense, lets pretend it is 0 A.D. for a moment.

1. Foucauldian truth: "S" is true iff "S" is socially manufactured. (Premiss)

we append to his theory the set of equivalencies (T),

2. X is true if and only if p.   (Premiss)

from which we derive the disquotation schema by virtue of the definitions of "X" and "p"

3. "S" is true iff *S.*   (Premiss)

4. "The sun revolves around the earth" is a socially manufactured belief. (Premiss)

Applying substitution

5. "The sun revolves around the earth" is true iff "The sun revolves around the earth" is socially manufactured   (1)

6. "The sun revolves around the earth" is true iff the sun revolves around the earth

(3)

7. The sun revolves around the earth   (4, 5, 6, MPP twice)

Now we see the incipient relativism: for Ptolemy, the sun revolves round the earth, but for us it is vice versa. I take it that the absurdity is obvious. Many false beliefs are socially manufactured, and for each false belief so manufactured, however absurd, we find ourselves asserting the content of that belief despite its falsity.

The only defence to the reductio is to find some way of evading the obligation to append the set of equivalencies. It can appear that Tarski gives a pragmatist room to do this. In "The concept of truth in formalized languages" Tarski admits that he is

> concerned exclusively with grasping the intentions which are contained in the so-called *classical* conception of truth ("true – corresponding with reality") in contrast, for example, with the *utilitarian* conceptions ("true – in a certain respect useful") (1956/1983, 153)

For this reason it might be thought that I am simply begging the question against pragmatists (and hence indirectly Foucault) by applying Tarski's material adequacy condition. But that would be incorrect. There are two different questions here. The first is about two different concepts – corresponding with reality versus being useful—and the second is about which of these concepts are we exercising when we ascribe the property of truth to a belief. Plainly there *are* these two different concepts: call them correspondence and usefulness. Nobody denies that the related *properties* of correspondence and usefulness are difficult to adequately characterise. But that is not the issue here, although pragmatists often think that the difficulties of characterising correspondence are sufficient to rule it out, whilst ignoring the similar problems they have in adequately characterising usefulness. Pragmatists have to resort to idealised notions such as, for example, "at the limit of scientific enquiry encompassing all possible

evidence" to evade their difficulties, and clearly Foucault cannot resort to such idealising manoeuvres without abandoning what he is claiming.

Tarksi is being unnecessarily cautious in his remark. The issue here is the second question: which of these concepts are deployed in our ascriptions of truth. The material adequacy condition does not presuppose correspondence but just captures the extension of our use of the concept truth. Whatever property it is that truth is, it is a property T which should satisfy the schema --"S" is T iff S. This can even be satisfied by minimalist theories of truth, so Tarski's disclaimer is unnecessary. We can dispense with it altogether and conclude that whatever the correct definition or theory of truth may be, if it is to be a definition or theory of the concept that we make use of then it will issue in all equivalencies of the form (T).

So, if Foucault is going to be saying anything significant about truth (as opposed to merely redefining the word) then in his theory he must be claiming that our ascriptions of truth attribute a pragmatic property (that of being socially manufactured) to a belief. Secondly, if Foucault's theory is a theory of truth (as opposed to a theory of something else) it must issue in all equivalencies of the form (T). When we put these two together we derive an absurdity, and hence prove that if his statement is an enunciation of a theory of truth rather than a redefinition of the word "truth" then he is enunciating a false theory.

The analysis just given reveals Foucault's statement "Truth is to be understood as a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation and operation of statements." to be Trollish. We have an exciting false theory of truth trading on an arbitrary redefinition. When pressed, he can retreat to his Motte and point out that he is using "truth" in this redefined way. Once the pressure eases he can leave his Motte and reoccupy the exciting Bailey. The redefinition sheds its grubby attire and once again appears arrayed as a glamourous proclamation of the identity of truth and power. Indeed, Foucault achieves yet more. Having it both ways is essential to the appeal of postmodernism, for it is precisely by apparently speaking simultaneously of two different concepts with the same word that the appearance of giving a profound but subtle analysis of a taken for granted concept is created. Here is Foucault doing exactly that:

> The important thing here, I believe, is that truth (1) isn't outside power, or lacking in power: contrary to a myth whose history and functions would repay further study, truth (2) isn't the reward of free spirits, the child of protracted solitude, nor the privilege of those who have succeeded in liberating themselves. Truth (3) is a thing of this world: it (4) is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it (5) induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth (6) , its "general politics" of truth (7) : that is, the types of discourse (8) which it accepts and makes function as true (9) ; the mechanisms (10) and instances which enable one to distinguish true (11) and false statements, the means (12) by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth (13); the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true (14). (Foucault 1972, 131, my numbering)

Let us say that Foucauldian truth is truth as "a system of ordered procedures for the production… of statements" and say that plain truth is whatever that property T it is that is had by true truth bearers that satisfies at least the disquotational schema ("S" is T iff S). In this quote, I analyse the appearances of truth as being satisfiable by these two different notions of truth as follows:

1) Foucauldian

2) Plain and Foucauldian
3) Plain and Foucauldian
4) Foucauldian
5) Foucauldian
6) Foucauldian
7) Foucauldian
8) Foucauldian
9) Plain
10) Foucauldian
11) Plain
12) Foucauldian
13) Plain and Foucauldian
14) Plain

As Humpty Dumpty said, "There's glory for you!" (Carroll 1962, 74)

Bloor as Humpty Dumpty

My second example of a Motte and Bailey doctrine founded on Humpty Dumptying is the Strong Programme in the Sociology of Knowledge. In *Knowledge and Social Imagery* David Bloor says

> The sociologist is concerned with knowledge, including scientific knowledge, purely as a natural phenomenon. The appropriate definition of knowledge will therefore be rather different from that of either the layman or the philosopher Instead of defining it as true belief— or perhaps, justified true belief—knowledge for the sociologist is whatever people take to be knowledge. It consists of those beliefs which people confidently hold to and live by. In particular the sociologist will be concerned with beliefs which are taken for granted or institutionalised, or invested with authority by groups of people. Of course knowledge must be distinguished from mere belief. This can be done by reserving the word "knowledge" for what is collectively endorsed, leaving the individual and idiosyncratic to count as mere belief. (1991, 5)

So knowledge is defined to be beliefs which

1. people confidently hold to and
2. people live by and
3. are collectively endorsed

Well, I suppose you have to admire the cheek of it! You will not now be surprised at finding passages in which Bloorian knowledge and plain knowledge mingle familiarly, nor at the ease with which the defensible Motte can be constructed. Indeed, this redefinition trivialises one of the really important questions with which the sociology of knowledge should concern itself: namely the analysis of whether and how the institutionalisation of the production of beliefs produces knowledge at all, and if it does whether and how it is more reliable than other means of acquiring beliefs. Good work on that question could produce substantial criticisms of philosophers" approaches to knowledge, in which the social factors playing a part in justification and how one comes to know are only weakly dealt with. But if by knowledge we mean only Bloorian knowledge we get no further than considering whether and how collectively endorsed beliefs are collectively endorsed. To get beyond that it is necessary to consider the rationality of how they come to be endorsed and the problem of whether and how beliefs can be true.

To evade the embarrassment that this charge of triviality inflicts on the strong programme, Bloor makes use of another arbitrary redefinition of truth:

> We are dealing, however, with … beliefs picked out by their truth and thus standing in a privileged relation to reality. What is the class thus picked out? Is it a natural kind of belief, or something analogous to a natural kind? …have philosophers discovered that there are two kinds of belief, distinguished by whether they possess or lack the property of corresponding to reality? Such a claim, however, could never be made good. We can't play God and compare our understanding of reality with reality as it is in itself, and not as it is understood by us. But if truths don't form a natural kind, what manner of class do they form? The alternative to their forming a natural kind is that they form a social kind. They form a class like the class of valid banknotes, or the class of holders of the Victoria Cross, or the class of husbands. Their membership in this class is the result of how they are treated by other people, though we must never forget that the reason for that treatment will be practical, complicated, and itself part of reality. (Bloor 1991, 174)

I note in passing the misrepresentation of what is required to compare our understanding of reality with reality (being God!) and also its irrelevance to whether true beliefs form a natural or some other kind. He is vulnerable to refutation by the very Jonsonian rebuttal which fails to refute Berkeley. Berkeley didn't think that Jonson's stone kicking was a failure to interact with reality. But what Bloor says amounts to the claim that when I bash my head on a low beam I am either God or I am comparing one piece of my understanding of reality not with reality but with another piece of my understanding of reality. This is absurd, although it takes some work to prove its absurdity. Here, however, I am more concerned with his redefinition of truth.

There is considerable underspecification of what might be meant by "the result of how they [truths] are treated by other people". Let us formulate this as

      4. x is true iff x is treated by other people in way y

There is also underspecification of what could be reasons for that treatment. Let us formulate it as

      5. x is treated by other people in way y iff there is reason z for so treating x.

If Bloor is to maintain his position that truth is not a matter of a belief standing in a privileged relation to reality, then clearly he cannot allow the following correspondence notion as reasons for treatment:

      6.   there is reason z for treating x in way y iff x corresponds to reality.

Nor can he allow a deflationary notion of reasons for treatment by way of disquotational schema, such as the following where S is a sentence expressing the proposition x:

      7.   there is reason z for treating x in way y iff S

For given either 6 or 7, you can derive the biconditionals "x is true iff x corresponds to reality" or "x is true iff S" (from 4, 5 and 6 or 4, 5 and 7 respectively). Then, fussing over whether the set of truths is a natural or social kind is irrelevant obfuscation. It is a set of beliefs that stand in a full bloodedly privileged relation to reality, since in both cases for each x, reality is as x says it is. So the question is, how does Bloor fill in the right hand side of the biconditional "there is reason z for treating x in way y iff…."? I cannot exhaustively prove that there is no satisfactory right hand side, but the burden is on Bloor to come up with one if he doesn't like the obvious one based on his remarks about social kinds:

8. there is reason z for treating x in way y iff x is collectively endorsed by people.

A nifty move this, since we seem now to have recovered a tripartite definition of knowledge that sounds exactly like the standard one. For from 4, 5 and 8 we derive

9. x is true iff x is collectively endorsed by people

By this definition of truth, Bloorian knowledge, by clause 3, is true. Also, a belief which satisfies clauses 1, 2 and 3 is a belief that is justified so far as Bloor has a notion of justification available. Hence Bloorian knowledge is, in its own lights, true justified belief.

So Bloor has not one but *two* Mottes to retreat to when pressed. Firstly, we have a Motte constructed from the surrounding materials of the Bailey. For strictly speaking, each of his uses of "knowledge" "truth" and "justified" should be subscripted with "Bloorian" in order to refer to the notions of which he is really making use. So his Bailey is his use of them unsubscripted and when pressed he retreats to his first Motte by putting the subscription back. Alternatively, he can retreat to a second Motte by pretending that in his unsubscripted use he really means nothing more than the plain use and is discussing a view of knowledge as true justified belief. As we saw with Foucault, blurring the distinction between the notions referred to creates the frisson available when, not pressed, Bloor occupies the Bailey. There, again, is glory for you.

Equivocating fulcra.

The effect of Humpty Dumptying, when cleverly used, it to create what I shall call an equivocal fulcrum. Archimedes (is said to have) said "give me a place to stand and a fulcrum and I shall move the world" and he said it because given a fulcrum one can use a lever both to multiply the applied force and change the direction of motion. Equivocal redefinition multiplies mere rhetorical force into argumentative effect, and disguises the direction of argumentative effect by appearing to go toward the truth whilst pushing the reader towards falsehood. One equivocal fulcrum is good for a million fallacious equivocations. Once created by one author, they are picked up and used by many others. They become fundamental to arguments for the entire doctrine being constructed.

Establishing equivocal fulcra by softening up arbitrary redefinitions

Unlike normal examples of equivocation where one exploits already existing, perhaps quite subtle, differences of meaning, Humpty Dumptying is hardly subtle. The differences in meaning are so obvious that equivocating by use of them cannot normally be pursued without first softening up the audience. The softening up is effected by convincing the audience that the dual meaning is some how an exposition of a profundity. When making the blatant and arbitrary redefinition, it is necessary that it should be presented as not so much a redefinition but more a matter of showing us a deeper content of the concept referred to by the word redefined. So the strategy is, as in Foucault's "Truth and power", to first make use of the word in its redefined sense, then present the redefinition as if it had already been established as the deeper content of the concept. Finally, the impression of profundity is sealed by the use of passages which elide both meanings at once. So truth is both plain and Foucauldian, knowledge both plain and Bloorian. Only after the audience has been inoculated by such passages can equivocating rhetoric move the world.

However, when Humpty Dumpties are having it both ways they have to watch out. An inadvertent return to clarity can make it all to obvious what is going on, as we see illustrated here:

> The intellectual can operate and struggle at the general level of that regime of truth (FT) which is so essential to the structure and functioning of our society. There is a battle "for truth"(FT), or at least "around truth"(FT) – it being understood once again that by truth I do not mean "the ensemble of truths (PT) which are to be discovered and accepted", but rather "the ensemble of rules (FT) according to which the true (PT) and the false are separated and specific effects of power attached to the true (?)", it being understood also that it's not a matter of a battle "on behalf" of the truth (?) but of a battle about the status of truth (?) and the economic and political role it plays. (Foucault 1972, 132-3)

I have labelled the appearances of "truth" plain - (PT) , Foucauldian - (FT) or (?), the latter being where I think the author wants it to be read both ways at once: read both ways at once in order to create the impression that *here* we are seeing the beginning of the benefits of his profound analysis of a taken for granted concept.

Creating these sorts of effects in an unstrained way is difficult. Perhaps we should admire the skill of great equivocators (pace Dali?). I think not, though, for clever paradoxicality passes off obscurity for profundity and we are none the wiser for it.

Whatever ones view on that question, I think it is evident that in this passage Foucault has shown poor craftsmanship; a reader not completely asleep is all too likely to read the qualification starting "it being understood once again…" as saying that by "truth" he doesn't mean truth at all, which does rather give the game away, and gives it away far too close to where the audience is being softened up.

Subtler establishment of equivocal fulcra: Lyotard

Humpty Dumptying is neither the only, nor perhaps the most powerful, way of establishing an equivocal fulcrum. Lyotard, in his *The Postmodern Condition: a Report on Knowledge,* establishes one by insinuating a bogus condition on what it is for knowledge to be knowledge. Indeed, the *Postmodern Condition* contains a cornucopia of fulcra created by subtle means which together have been used by subsequent authors to assert what Lyotard merely hints at: that there is a vicious presupposition of values in any definition of knowledge. That is, of course, one of the central philosophical doctrines of postmodernism.

Lyotard's position is roughly this. Science shows narratives to be mere fable. But insofar as science claims to go beyond noting regularities and claims to be telling or seeking the truth "it is obliged to legitimate the rules of its own game" (Lyotard 1984, 482). Philosophy is the discourse of legitimation produced by science. He says

> I will use the term modern to designate any science that legitimates itself by making an explicit appeal to some grand narrative, such as the dialectics of Spirit, the hermeneutics of meaning, the emancipation of the rational or working subject, or the creation of wealth. (1984, 482).

We have here something subtler than Humpty-Dumptying, for certainly with care in his continued use of "modern" this terminology cannot be objected to on its own. The problem is that by the end of the report what ends up convicted of the faults of this modernism is not only those continuations of Enlightenment rationalism which have indulged in those faults, but all of modern philosophy (which in this context started with Descartes). He continues

> if a metanarrative implying a philosophy of history is used to legitimate knowledge, questions are raised concerning the validity of the institutions

governing the social bond: these must be legitimated as well. Thus justice is consigned to the grand narrative in the same way as truth. (1984, 482)

He defines "*postmodern* as incredulity toward metanarratives" of this kind and declares a crisis because of "the obsolescence of the metanarrative apparatus of legitimation" (1984, 482). It's a crisis because, as he presents the matter, we need legitimation and so need metanarratives, but can't have them.

What he accepts from his modernism, and what has been accepted by postmodernists since, is that there is a justificatory burden which metanarratives *correctly* sought to fulfil. The burden is to provide a legitimating discourse constituted by a single unifying justification of what knowledge is, why we should desire it and what the good society is. That thought is wrong-headed, and is the beginning of a muddle that postmodernism has continued to exploit. Now I'm prepared to concede that some continuations of Enlightenment rationalism may face a crisis. But the wrong-headed thought surreptitiously confers a burden of justification on philosophy which it doesn't face, and also seriously misrepresents the nature of the thinking on these questions that some modern philosophers have offered. Let me spell that out a bit.

An example he gives of legitimation by some grand narrative is his judgement on

the rule of consensus between the sender and addressee of a statement with truth value is deemed acceptable if it [the rule] is cast in terms of a possible unanimity between rational minds. (1984, 482)

He then characterises this as being an expression of "the Enlightenment narrative, in which the hero of knowledge works towards a good ethico-political end – universal peace". (1984, 482) Surely it need be nothing so grandiose. I take it that he is saying that a criterion for rules of consensus can be given as

- X is a rule for consensus if X expresses a way rational minds could have the same belief.

We can justify this sort of principle in terms of a belief being rational relative to evidence, context of the believer and so on without resorting to political heroism.

What exactly is our concern with legitimising science or knowledge? Talk of legitimating science could be a matter of

(a) justifying whether what it produces is knowledge *or*
(b) justifying whether what it produces is desirable.

Likewise, talk of legitimising knowledge could be

(a) determining what it is for something to be knowledge (e.g. it is a true justified belief, or a truth tracking belief, or a true belief got by a reliable method) *or*
(b) explaining why we should want knowledge.

It is characteristic of postmodernism to claim that each of these pairs of legitimisations are inseparable, and also that all four are inseparable. I think it is plain that Lyotard is committed to this claim, for whilst he is sceptical of metanarratives in his discussion of what he presents as the contemporary failure of legitimation the failure is only a failure insofar as it fails in one or another of these respects. But that could only be diagnosed as a failure of legitimation if all are required together.

The way Lyotard is using the word "legitimation" here is equivocal, and its equivocality is maintained throughout *the Postmodern Condition*. He does not give us arguments to the inseparability of these distinct notions, but relentlessly discusses both science and knowledge as if the questions of what they are and whether they are desirable were not separate. By systematically exploiting the available ambiguity in talk of

legitimation and status when applied to knowledge he imposes on knowledge the obligation to contain its own reason for being desired.

But determining what knowledge is and justifying why we should want it are two quite independent matters. Obviously answers to the latter presuppose the former, simply because whether we should desire knowledge depends on what it is. Lyotard gives us no reasons for thinking that what knowledge is depends on what is desirable. The definition of knowledge does not require a prior answer as to why it is desirable, nor does it require some overarching metanarrative to make it cogent. Consistent answers to both senses of legitimising science can be given: epistemology tells us why we should take its truth claims to be knowledge, and political and moral theory tells us whether and why we should practise it. Epistemology considers what knowledge is, political and moral theory can tell us whether it is desirable. There is no vicious presupposition between knowledge and ethics of the sort implied by equivocating between the two senses of legitimising knowledge or by vague remarks about the value ladenness of knowledge due to its theory ladenness. So Lyotard's importation of metanarratives is here merely a matter of believing we need an answer of a sort we don't need. Indeed, it ought to be utterly laughable that knowing that it is raining, or what Young's modulus for steel is, requires the clanking machinery of a metanarrative. Only those burning for certainty but caught too long in the sceptics stare reach first for metanarratives before retreating to the sulk that is postmodernism.

However, that is to miss the great success of Lyotard's rhetorical strategy. Ever since *the Postmodern Condition* postmodernists have continued to proclaim the crisis first announced by Lyotard. For here he has created equivocal notions of legitimisation, science and knowledge which, once those fulcra are accepted, do seem to be in need of the sort of martialling that a metanarrative seems to offer. The thought that knowledge needs a metanarrative, when metanarratives have failed, is the source of the rather hysterical approach to epistemology that postmodernists are inclined to evince. For if that is what you believe, you will be inclined to think that epistemology faces a crisis to which it hasn't got an answer, since the required answers *have* to be metanarratives, yet metanarratives have failed.

The Postmodernist Fox-trot.

First of all, a normative theory of rationality is a theory which says that there are ways for us to be correctly related to the world and offers substantial theories of what those ways are. Such a position on rationality is often attacked by postmodernists by use of what I call the Postmodernist Fox-trot, often prefaced by Troll's Truisms such as: "rationality has a history"(Derrida – Oxford Amnesty Lectures), "rationality is merely whatever we take it to be" (Rorty).

The Postmodernist Fox-trot goes like this:

Firstly the meta-philosophical claim is made that philosophy cannot properly be done except negatively: that to occupy a position is already to be mistaken. I am going to refer to this position as the No-Position Position. Secondly, alogosia is asserted: true normative theories of objective rationality are not available; whatever we take to be the canons of rationality are constructed, so could have been constructed differently, and that although there may be some ways in which they could not be constructed, among those ways in which they can be constructed there are no better or worse ways of constructing them. The upshot of this pair, the foxy bit, is that the postmodernist can *use* normative notions of rationality whilst evading accountability to rational standards. By the substitution of

vague terminology in place of standard rational terminology, for example, the use of "valid" instead of "true", by the widespread use of scare quotes whenever rational terminology is used, he exploits a contradiction which the official position, the No-Position Position, allows him to keep hidden.

Neither of these claims need be stated plainly. Rather, they can be appealed to by insinuation whenever someone, such as myself, attempts to refute the position. Since the position is never plainly occupied, it need never be plainly defended. For example, for Rorty "truth is not the sort of thing one should expect to have a philosophically interesting theory about" (Rorty 1982, xiii) so a demonstration that his position on truth is incoherent is ultimately irrelevant, because in such a case he can retreat to the No-Position Position (or rather, allude to the possibility of such retreat, since to overtly retreat there would be to adopt a position: possibly inconsistent and certainly unwise since now opponents have something to get their teeth into). If, on the other hand, the No-Position Position is argued against, why, argument has already been shown to be bankrupt in the attack on normative theories of rationality, which attack will have claimed that argument is a tool of oppression, a structuring of power relations or whatever.

Rorty's fox-trot

Now it may be that Rorty is right when he says "This [thinking about rationality and truth] is one of those issues which puts everything up for grabs at once, where there is no point in trying to find agreement about "the data" or about what would count as deciding the questions" (Rorty 1982, xliii). It may be that once we have thought about it we just find ourselves to be subscribers to a No-Position Position. This is similar to Kierkegaard's doctrine: that to subscribe to rationality (the rationality which at that time seemed to be refuting Christian belief) is no less a leap of faith than religious belief.

Certainly, at some point it may come down to what premisses seem self evident, or at least, acceptable. But it is not yet clear that at that point we *do* come to widely differing premisses. Furthermore, those who subscribe to negative and anti-rationalist meta-philosophical theses often seem to count those theses as among the premisses self evident at the beginning of the enquiry, and that surely is a mistake. So it is no defence to claim that the No-Position Position is just there after a bit of ground clearing. There must be some path to it, and that path cannot consist of an application of that very position without begging the question.

Consistency demands that if one subscribes to the No-Position Position one cannot put it forward. Its supporters seem to believe their position coherent so long as they do not overtly advance it, but only allude to it, insinuate it. To me, this seems to be a distinction without a difference. To subscribe to it is to advance it. No matter that you don't write it down or say it or think it. Even though they haven't said it, it is clear what the claim is, despite their immediate retreat to other step of the Fox-trot when challenged on this point.

I think it is incoherent to subscribe to the No-Position Position, but suppose it were not. There is still a question of how one comes to adopt it. Postmodernists cannot just appeal to the No-Position Position as part of an argument for it. Indeed, it must be incoherent to argue for it. As far as I can see, the *only* way of establishing such a position is to lead us to a thought, a vision perhaps, which compels assent, which assent must itself transcend what we normally mean by assent in thought, since otherwise the very assent is incoherent. This really does seem to be a view from the top of Wittgenstein's ladder.

So the No-Position Position faces several charges. Firstly, it looks too convenient. Far from the being a serious consideration of the difficulties of rationality and thought, the No-Position Position looks like a device that allows one to spout off whilst avoiding awkward arguments and possible refutation. Secondly, to adopt it requires some transcendent vision. Thirdly, it is incoherent. Now it may well be that the people who live at the top of the ladder have answers to these charges, in which case they must give us those answers, instead of, as they often seem to do, think that the insinuation of the No-Position Position is itself an answer.

And given that Postmodernists do not lead us to a transcendent vision and cannot just appeal to their No-Position Position as a self evident premiss, we must reject claims that there can be no meta-philosophical discussion beyond stating, as Rorty does, that "this is one of those issues which puts everything up for grabs at once" and that all that is left is blank and mute subscription to the meta-philosophical premisses to ones taste.

On the contrary, where the No-Position Position stops is just where philosophy starts. If all the postmodernist has to say is that he starts from different premisses, but he doesn't want to talk about it, he hasn't begun to engage in a philosophical project.

Bloor's fox-trot

With this in mind, I want to turn to a subtle example of the Fox-trot from Bloor. Bloor enumerates (1991, 7) some principles to which the strong programme is committed in doing sociology of knowledge; that is, in giving explanations of how beliefs come to be endorsed. The third principle states that the same types of causes should be used to explain true and false beliefs, and this is referred to as "the symmetry requirement". Well there is a certain amount of wriggling room in the use of the word "type" here, but I think the principle has a clear implication: that we must rule out the truth value of a belief from being relevant to explaining why it is believed.

There is a danger of self refutation here, which is brought to light when we come to consider the problem of what we ought to believe.

Bloor considers that there are only two positions that can be taken about reason: you can be a naturalist like him or a rationalist like Worrall (1990) or Geach. Bloor denies that there is any position between these two:

> composite positions are incoherent…[by] making reason both a part of nature and also not a part of nature. If they don't put it outside nature they lose their grip on its privileged and normative character, but if they do, they deny its natural status. They can't have it both ways. (1991, 178)

He remarks "clear headed rationalists know what is at stake… [they] must suppose that we can intuit evidential relations and some logical truths" (1991, 178) Rationalists must appeal to an " abstract, non-physical realm [existing] over and above the flux of biological and cultural change" (1991, 178) if they are to explain and justify the normative force of reasons for belief. But such rationalists are always embarrassed by the problem of explaining how we can get a grip on the abstract so we can get a grip on the norms.

For Bloor, then, the rationality of belief is "an hypothesis not needed". The symmetry requirement encapsulates this by virtue of stopping "the intrusion of a non-naturalistic notion of reason into the causal story." (1991, 177)

So here is a rather subtle denial of normative theories of rationality: such theories are not available to naturalists, and Bloor is claiming that his strong programme represents natural science applied to knowledge.

However, he cannot, for the reasons I am about to give, adopt an anti-rationalist position explicitly without undermining our grip on why we should listen to anything he has to say. So for this reason, having feinted at the rationalists he must himself adopt the No-Position Position about rationality, and this is why he says

> The symmetry requirement… is not designed to exclude an appropriately naturalistic construal of reason, whether this be psychological or sociological. Brown (1989) for example, is typical in mistaking the sociologists rejection of a non-naturalistic notion of reason as a rejection of reasoning as such. (1991, 177)

The strong programme asks for our acceptance of it on the grounds that it is true, whilst at the same time claiming that such grounds are irrelevant when explaining how it is that we believe what we believe. So in its own lights, it cannot account for the normative force of its own truth as part of how we might come to believe in the strong programme. Yet Bloor quite plainly thinks we ought to believe in the strong programme for the reasons that he gives: he seems to be saying that reasons, qua reasons, are not what brings us to belief. Why then does he adduce reasons *as reasons*? Why reason with us at all? Why append an afterword to the second edition of his book in which at some length he takes on and rebuts the arguments of his critics?

For simplicity, and in order to avoid the easy slips which etiolated redefinitions of "premisses" and "conclusions" might import, let us talk of the set S of considerations he adduces and the doctrine D he wishes to induce.

One reply that is available to him is that he takes it that in uttering S he is issuing the appropriate causes to bring about belief in D.

First of all, we can recognise from the content of S that what we would accept to be rationally relevant considerations are what he must be taking to be causally efficacious. Suppose for the sake of argument that S constitutes reasons for believing D. That, of itself, and in the light of the body of empirical evidence about human irrationality, would not lead us to think that the uttering of those reasons would be reliably causally efficacious in bringing about the desired belief. Precisely the opposite in fact. So it cannot be that he takes what he is doing to be in any very simple sense causally efficacious in bringing about belief in D.

It must then be that he takes S to be reasons to believe in D, where reasons to believe are yet causes of belief, only their causally efficacy is obscure and indirect. But for him to take his utterances in this way is difficult to understand in the light of his version of naturalism. He is saying that S are reasons for D, that the reason relation is an obscure and intermittent causal relation, which nevertheless we can appreciate as holding. But how can we appreciate it as holding? In his lights all we would have are observations of people believing various doctrines in the light of various sets of considerations, without there being evident relations holding between the sets of considerations and the doctrines.

But without some accessible notion of normative connections between beliefs, this seems quite mysterious. In the absence of such a notion how could we ever appreciate any relation whatsoever holding between S and D when any such relation cannot manifest itself other than in a complicated and inconsistent causal manner. If there is nothing that makes it correct or incorrect that S is a reason for believing D, but merely that S variously brings about or does not bring about the belief that D, how can Bloor maintain that *he* grasps a relation holding between S and D. He can't just retreat to the claim that, for him, they do bring about the belief that D but they may not for us, since that is to renounce his attitude towards them. For clearly he takes it that some sets of considerations for believing in D are correct, and others are not correct (else why bother to correct misapprehensions

of the strong programme). Within the strong programme there is no suitable notion of correctness to apply here. Bloor's own theory cannot account for his attitude towards it.

Well, I'm not sure that I have completely nailed down what is wrong here, but I hope I have said enough to further illustrate the potential subtlety of the Postmodernist Fox-trot. Bloor feints at normative theories of rationality, but eschews explicit rejection of rationality, adopting a No-Position Position instead. Thereby he seems to be able to have it both ways: he's not saying that there is no such thing as reasons, only that the truth or falsity of a belief is not part of the explanation for belief in it; he thinks we ought to agree with him, but not because reasons can have normative force.

Fox-trotting as tu quoque ad hominem argument

One final resort for eager Fox-trotters is the claim that in using rational vocabulary they are really offering rationalists tu quoque ad hominem arguments which should lead a rationalist to abandon rationalism and accept alogosia. That is to say, they claim to be offering arguments which have the form

P

if P then $\neg P$

therefore $\neg P$

where P is a conjunction of the premises accepted by rationalists, where the second premiss can be shown to be true or to follow from the first using rules of inference accepted by rationalists, and where this being a valid form of argument rationalists are committed to accepting the conclusion if they accept the premises.

If Postmodernist Fox-trotters claim to be making this move in their dance between using rational vocabulary whilst officially taking the No-Position Position, then I would like to see an actual example. For whilst I have heard this defence on a number of occasions, it never seems to get followed up by a case of their own prior use of rational vocabulary as tu quoque ad hominem. Rather there is a retreat to quite standard sceptical arguments and classical paradoxes.

Only rarely are standard sceptical arguments and classical paradoxes based on rationalism as a whole and so they cannot threaten rationalism as a whole. The sceptical arguments are certainly important, but to take them as conclusive rather than a protracted and important stalemate which has also been a fertile source of much good philosophy is a mistake. Some questions just are very difficult and their full resolution may even be beyond our capacities. It would therefore be premature to retreat to alogosia because we have yet to resolve the big sceptical arguments.

Now certainly the paradoxical arguments are embarrassing to rationalists. However, there is a long history of displaying such arguments to embarrass rationalists, only for them eventually to show what is going wrong — which is not to say that all paradoxes have been satisfactorily solved. Not uncommonly famous paradoxes are marched out and paraded in an attempt to offer an argument of the just given form. See for example Bloor's use of the Sorites paradox (Bloor 1991, 182). What postmodernists show in their crude use of paradox is a lack of understanding of relevant context. Anyone familiar with the field of work in paradoxes will concede that they are an indication of something amiss, but we take this to be an opportunity for some advancement of understanding. What would be required for the sort of conclusion the postmodernist wants is a sustained history of failure in the face of paradox. But that is exactly what is lacking. Instead we have a sustained history of fruitful work on paradoxes which has resulted in very important extensions and refinements of our conceptual resources.

Rankly relativising fields and absolute irrationalism

When we look at postmodernist equivocal fulcra we find that most are constituted by equivocal accounts of concepts central to philosophy. We find again and again equivocal accounts of knowledge, truth, objectivity, and normativity being constructed and then used to redirect arguments the postmodernist way. In the large, that redirection amounts to a rejection of objective rationality.

In defending that rejection we see the power of Motte and Bailey Doctrines in general. The battery of equivocal concepts constitute something of a lightly defensible ditch round the Bailey, since attack on one is usually met by use of another in defence: criticism of misuse of the word "knowledge" is met with an argument from Foucauldian truth, for example. Under sufficiently detailed attack the fulcra are abandoned to become mere boulders in the landscape again. The postmodernists retreat to the Motte and trot out their Troll's Truisms and the flattered audience can continue to think that really, postmodernism is unexceptionably true: how can any one dispute it? And what is it that seems true? That objective accounts of the central notions of rationality cannot be defended.

Once one has a battery of such equivocal concepts, a school of fox-trotting writers making use of them, and an audience flattered to think that in accepting them it has a grasp on the profundities, a field of enquiry has degenerated to what I shall call a rankly relativising field. Participants are relentlessly sucked in by use of the rhetorical effects of first one and then another equivocal concept, and resistance is quelled by the insinuation of the Non-Position Position and alogosia. The rankly relativising field of postmodernism has scooped up the lost souls of the social sciences and literary arts and sucked them into absolute irrationalism.

Absolute irrationalism is that every assertion is as good as any other. Such a position is immediately self refuting. Even if we disregard the truth directedness of assertion, to assert requires that there be a difference between correct and incorrect uses of language, a distinction which absolute irrationalism cannot maintain. Without such a distinction, there are noises, but not signals, let alone speech or thought. But not even postmodernists believe that they neither speak nor think, and if they do, their very thought refutes them, however much they wish to reject what Descartes built on such a foundation. If there are correct and incorrect uses of language then assertions about the language are not all equal: some are correct and some are not.

The overt incoherence of absolute irrationalism is the reason for the textualism of postmodernism. If there are reference relations by which the terms of a language refer to things in the world, then there is at least that extent of objective rationality to do with successfully referring to what one intends to refer to. But alogosia denies the consequent and so "The text is all and nothing exists outside of it"(Derrida 1976, 158). Yet no more can one escape absolute irrationalism by resorting to textualism than can one escape a black hole having reached its event horizon. Postmodernists cannot stop at this point without conceding objective rational standards of reference to text. Consequently, they must go beyond Putnam's position (Putnam 1983) that there inadequate constraints to pick out a unique reference relation. They are committed to there being no such thing as reference relations, and so texts cannot even contain truths about texts. Every assertion is as good as any other and there are no differences in correct or incorrect uses of language. Thus must postmodernists fall into absolute irrationalism.

Falling into a black hole, when you reach the event horizon, to observers you appear to stop and instead your image slowly fades, whilst in fact you carry on going, getting more and more compressed by gravity. Such is the fate of postmodernists. Their rankly

relativising field collapses into the black hole of absolute irrationalism. We see their wraiths havering at the horizon, forever in our view, yet growing forever dimmer, and think they may yet return to us. But they have long ago passed beyond, getting denser as they go.

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