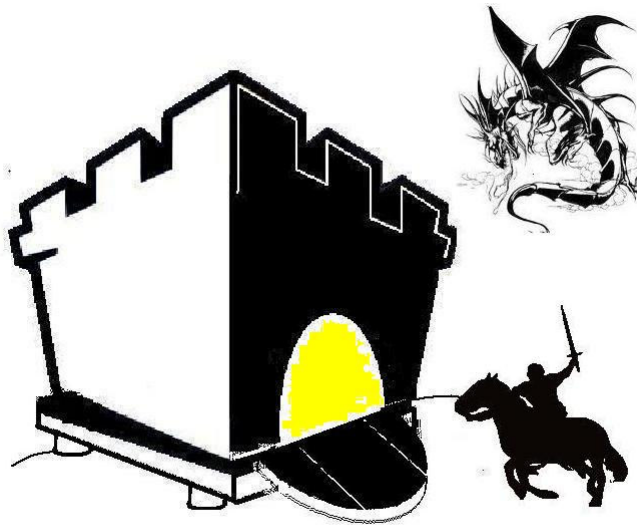

Fortress Living



Three Solutions for Your Greatest Problems in Life

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Lesson Twelve

“Post-Modern” Solutions to the Greatest Problems in Life

Seven Historical Periods

PERIOD	YEARS	Normative Solutions (Philosophy and Theology)	Situational Solutions (Arts and Culture)	Relational Solutions (Ethics and Spirituality)
Ancient	5 th Century BC to 5 th Century AD	The State Gives Norms ----- <i>Rationalism</i>	Classicism ----- Stauary	* Ethical Hedonism * Bad: religious persecution * Good: religious purification
Medieval	500 AD to 1400	The Church Gives Norms ----- <i>Scholasticism</i>	Mysticism ----- Byzantine	* Ethical Legalism * Bad: Biblical illiteracy * Good: Piety and Devotion
Renaissance	1400 to 1600	Reason Gives Norms ----- <i>Humanism</i>	Naturalism ----- Giotto	* Ethical Dualism * Bad: compartmentalization * Good: helpful inventions
Enlightenment	1600 to 1800	Subjective Mind Gives Norms ----- <i>Rational Idealism</i>	Neoclassicism ----- Beethoven and J.L David	* Ethical Utopianism * Bad: idolatry of the state * Good: religious liberty
Scientific	1800 to 1900	Science Gives Norms ----- <i>Empiricism</i>	Romanticism ----- R. Wagner <i>Ring Cycle</i>	* Ethical Positivism * Bad: reason over revelation * Good: reasons to believe
Modern	1900 to 2000	Self Gives Norms ----- <i>Pragmatism</i>	Impressionism ----- <i>Monet Poplars at Giverny</i>	* Ethical Individualism * Bad: social isolation * Good: inner spirituality
Post-modern	2000 and Beyond	No Norms ----- <i>Nihilism</i>	Deconstructionism ----- <i>Picasso Le Demoiselles</i>	* Ethical Relativism * Bad: reject tradition * Good: truth alone

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Post-modern	2000 and Beyond	No Norms ----- <i>Nihilism</i>	Deconstructionism ----- Picasso <i>Le Demoiselles</i>	* Ethical Relativism * Bad: reject tradition * Good: truth alone
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The Period: 2000 to Present

You may notice in the time periods under consideration that the length of each one has gotten shorter. The Ancient Period covered nearly a thousand years and the Medieval almost the same. But as history has unfolded, the pace of change has quickened. In fact, some social observers have concluded that never before in history has there been so much change in such a short time. Selecting the rollover to the 21st century was very arbitrary. There was nothing to distinguish 2000 from 1999 in the normative, situational and relational solutions to the greatest problems in life. Indeed, it could be argued that the dominant normative solution we're considering, what I call Nihilism and Post-Modernism, began their ascent generations before.

Yet, for ease of memory, we'll consider these "contemporary" phenomena and in this lesson see what happens when there are no more norms and when the hopes and dreams of modernity have all but died.

Dominant Normative Solutions: Nihilism



There are many names associated with Post-Modern Nihilism but the one I've chosen to describe here is a French Jew named Jacques Derrida. The best way to explain Post-Modern Nihilism is that it is a method of dealing with a world in which there is no real meaning or purpose. What method could possibly be useful in such a milieu? Derrida did not want us to live with the illusion that life meant more than it really does. So, the best thing to do is expose all the illusions and errors wherever they are found.

One of the strongest influences on Derrida was a 19th century philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche. Nietzsche, a man ahead of his time, anticipated a world where all meaning and objective value had been lost. For Nietzsche, the only thing that remained was power, particularly the "will to power" as exemplified in the great heroes of the past. These heroes (ubermensch) triumphed over the meaninglessness and hopelessness of existence through sheer force of will.

Derrida appreciated Nietzsche's struggle. But it seems to me he rejected his solution. The hope was not some kind of superman to triumph over all.

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Rather, Derrida saw man's task as to clear away as much delusion as possible—particularly the traditions and institutions of power that so often abuse and exploit individuals. In other words, if there is any purpose of life, it's to demonstrate that whoever says there is a purpose doesn't know what he's talking about!

Like so many intellectuals, Derrida spent considerable time addressing issues of politics and power. Suspicious of any who claimed to have the answers to the greatest problems in life, Derrida nonetheless believed that Marxist-Socialist ideas, if properly “deconstructed” (rid of delusions) were the best hope for it.

Another Post-Modern Nihilist who had a significant impact on the period was Michael Foucault. Foucault was especially interested in exposing the uses and abuses of power in social, industrial and political relationships. Like many other Marxists, he viewed the history of the world in economic terms—a contest for survival between the “haves” and the “have-nots.” Though he was initially enamored of Mao Tse Tung, believing him to genuinely offer the kind of classless society he dreamed of, the abuses of the Cultural Revolution (in which thousands of Chinese were imprisoned and killed by the communist government) disillusioned him and he eventually rejected Mao.

He continued to decry the exercise of power over others, however, focusing especially on the socially accepted abuses of power in the medical and psychiatric community. Foucault's doctoral dissertation studied the development of modern medicine and how it utilized “madness” to gain power and exploit the helpless. For Foucault, as for Derrida, this was the ultimate abuse of power and they saw their mission as unmasking it.

This passion for exposing abuse and exploitation led Derrida and Foucault to what can only be termed “anarchism.” Anarchists have no “positive” vision for society; only a negative one. They do not pretend to promote true ideas but only tear down false ones. In other words, Post-Modern Nihilism cannot and will not say what *is* true or what *is* real or what anything *does* mean. The only message they offer is what it is *not*. No wonder some call Post-Modernism an “anti-philosophy.”

Dominant Situational Solutions: Deconstructionism

If the Post-Modern Nihilism of Derrida and Foucault was an anti-philosophy, the artistic works of the Deconstructionists were anti-art. It may sound cruel, but one can only conclude that their expressions served to show what art is *not*.

Certainly one of the most well-known deconstructionists in the arts was Pablo Picasso. Before looking at some of his post-modern works, however, it would be useful to examine some of his traditional drawings and paintings in which his considerable talent is evident.

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Conventional Expressions by Picasso

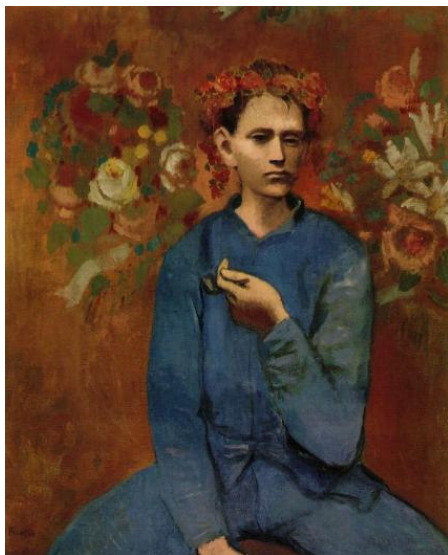
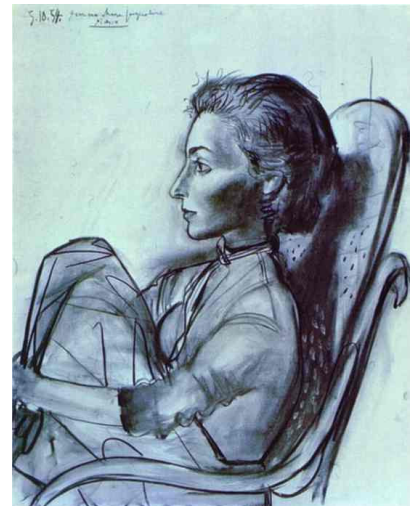


Bull - 1945

Picasso had a particular fascination with bulls. He studied and drew many of them. Though his plate from 1945 is not strictly speaking representational art (in the sense of a photographic reproduction), it nonetheless is quite traditional in its faithfulness to what “real” bulls look like.

Jacqueline Rocque - 1954

Picasso’s many marriages and mistresses throughout his life is the stuff of Hollywood legend. This one of a woman named Jacqueline was painted in 1954. Though there are some stylized (non-representational) elements—such as the coloration and her posture, the detail and expression on her face is remarkably delicate and representational.



Boy with a Pipe - 1905

Though few artists would suggest that photographic realism is the ultimate measure of skill, Picasso’s painting called Boy with a Pipe, from 1905, combined both realism with mystery and emotion.

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Deconstructed Expressions by Picasso



Three Musicians - 1921

Picasso's "deconstructionist" sentiments are seen in his famous, Three Musicians painting from 1921. Specifically, this painting is reflective of an artistic style known as "cubism" in which the distinctive shapes before the painter are organized or assembled in a fragmented (cubistic) form. If you can't tell, the three musicians are actually friends, gathered together for a musical "jam session." It's generally believed that the three men in the portrait were Picasso and his friends, Appolinaire and Jacob.



Guernica - 1937

This is one of Picasso's most famous cubist paintings. Guernica was the site of a WWII bombing that left many deaths. Picasso's painting is generally viewed as an anti-war protest and the dissembled figures are intended to show the destruction and carnage of the conflict, while the colors—black and gray—reflect a sad, somber grief.

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Picasso was certainly not the only painter to use the cubist style—though he was the most famous. Nor was cubism the only deconstructionist style available. At least Picasso maintained some representational elements—as fragmented and “deconstructed” as they were. Some of the later deconstructionist painters rejected any kind of representation at all. Marcel Duchamp is an example. His most famous work is called *Nude Descending a Staircase*. And though a careful examination can detect movement and a staircase, that’s about it.

Another deconstructionist style of this period is called Dadaism. Begun after WWII as a protest against traditional artistic expression, Dadaists like Duchamp proudly and defiantly called themselves “anti-artists.” It wasn’t a lack of artistic skill rather a rejection of any desire for beauty, order and grace in their art, believing that since there was no beauty, order or grace in the world (particularly after the atrocities of WWII) there could be none in art either.

Dominant Relational Solutions: Ethical Relativism

There is little difference between the ethics of the modern and post-modern periods. I called the moral theory of the last period, Ethical Individualism and I will call this Ethical Relativism. But in practice they produce the same result. Even as deconstructionists present an anti-philosophy and an anti-art, we could argue that they promote an anti-ethic as well. A “true” relativist has no desire to even create a unified or consistent system of ethics since he rejects any norms or transcendent values. The only thing “right” is what’s right for him. And that is likely to change within a few moments.

If relational solutions are the bridge between norms and situations in life, it is difficult not to feel an overwhelming sense of despair about this solution! Think about how it would play out in a marriage, family or workplace. If every decision and value is relative, there can be no trust or shared purpose. Though deconstructionists often try and candy-coat their anti-ethic under the guise of human freedom (“no one can tell me how to live my life”) freedom in such a context is only a mirage. There can be no freedom without limits or responsibilities. What remains is not liberty but chaos. One of the most memorable examples of how a deconstructionist ethic works is found in the Hollywood version of *Batman: the Dark Knight*. The Joker is vividly portrayed as a post-modern, deconstructionist whose only goal is to destroy and confuse. And that is what you are left with when all normative solutions are rejected.



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The Limits of Post-Modern Deconstructionism

- **The Deconstructionist Foundation –The Norms of Life**

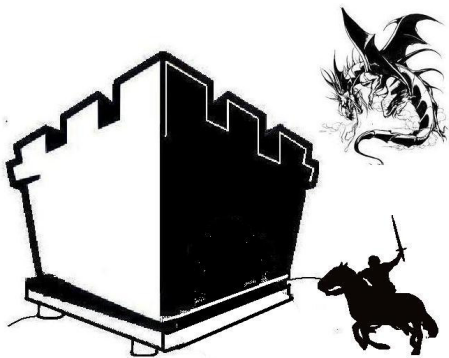


The oxymoron (contradiction) “deconstructionist foundation” only serves to highlight the painful misery and absurdity of Post-Modern Nihilism. By very definition, a “foundation” is something solid and enduring. In earlier times, thinkers built their foundations out of various materials—some better and more enduring than others. But they always recognized the need for a foundation. Recall the parable of the Wise

Man and the Foolish Man. The Wise Man built his house on rock and the Foolish Man on sand. But they both had a foundation. No one in those days could have envisioned a day when there would be no foundation at all! Yet that is where Post-Modern Deconstructionists insist on taking us.

I mentioned in the last lesson that the foundation of Kantian thought was flawed and the foundation of Modern Pragmatism a pile of rubble. The “anti-foundation” of Post-Modern Deconstruction is not simply a pile of rubble but an attempt to remove the rubble and put nothing in its place.

- **The Post-Modern Structure –The Situations of Life**



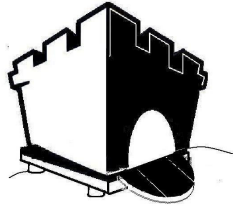
I suppose it’s becoming redundant to say it, but there is so little that can be said positively about Post-Modernism since it offers no real solutions to the greatest problems in life. We saw this in the arts where the sensitive men used their talent and passion to create a hitherto unheard of genre called “anti-art.”

If situational solutions to the great problems of life mean the ordering of the facts and data of experience in some kind of meaningful arrangement, the fragmentation and chaos evident in Deconstructionist art serves only to remind us that there is no meaningful arrangement!

We are left to wonder why they even bother to paint or write. Of course, there is a reason, though it’s not flattering of the artists. Men like Picasso and Duchamp became very wealthy from their work, managing to convince their patrons of their value. Perhaps instead of viewing the artist as the knight riding the horse, fleeing for safety to the castle, we should redefine the figures in our drawing. In the Post-Modern Period, the artist is not the rider but the fire breathing dragon, using his talent to scorch and destroy everything in his path.

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- The Post-Modern Access – The Relationships of Life



If I'm correct and the "dragon" is now the "hero" of the story, there is little point in describing the draw bridge as an object of safety by which we can find refuge in the fortress. A "consistent" deconstructionist (another oxymoron!) views all fortresses, all draw bridges and all foundations as the problem, not a solution. Can any relationship, no matter how sacred, be called a bridge of hope? Not likely, for any relationship poses a threat to the self—if not now, it will at some point.

In one of the greatest twists of "fate" in history, the villain has now become the hero and those previously identified as heroes are now villains. Institutions like the church, government, industry or even academia are declared to be perpetrators of the problem rather than saviors and solvers. As I said above, the fire-breathing dragon is the hero of this new story, making one wonder who wrote it.

Throughout the Bible, since the beginning of civilization, the Devil has been portrayed as a "dragon." In the Garden of Eden, he comes disguised as a snake and in the last book of the Bible, Revelation, he is portrayed as a dragon. Could it be that this was his plan all along in history—to convince as many as possible that he was the real hero and other supposed heroes really the villains? This seems to be what it was all about. And it makes the writings and musings of the Deconstructionist Nihilists even more disturbing. For they are not merely desperate cries of sadness and despair at what never will be. Rather they are the crazed delusions of madmen who believe they alone are right and everyone else wrong.



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Quiz 12 Questions

1. The years covered in our discussion of the Modern Period are
 - a. 1800 to 1900
 - b. 1900 to 2000
 - c. 2000 to the present

2. The dominant normative solution to the greatest problems in life during this era we called
 - a. Rationalism
 - b. Pragmatism
 - c. Nihilism

3. Two influential philosophers of post-modern normative solutions discussed in this lesson were
 - a. Derrida and Foucault
 - b. Freud and Darwin
 - c. Sartre and Ionesco

4. Picasso used what artistic style to express his deconstructionist views?
 - a. Realism
 - b. Impressionism
 - c. Cubism

5. Ultimately, this lesson described Post-Modern Ethics as:
 - a. An anti-ethic
 - b. A misguided ethic
 - c. An important ethic