Postmodernism and a Fourth Modernity Democracy

_Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault: “Supermodernism”_

“The will to a system is a lack of integrity,” Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) wrote in _Twilight of the Idols_ (1888), expressing what would become the central theme of postmodern thought, traced from Nietzsche through Martin Heidegger to Michel Foucault, Jean-François Lyotard, and Jacques Derrida. The pattern of thought assumes, Allan Megill has observed, “cultural crisis, a derelict present, [and] a nothing out of which everything must be created.” It thus reflects in some measure the critical, antiuniversalist mood of the first and second modernities that had caused first Alexander Pope to lament in 1729 of a “chaos! . . . [a] universal Darkness [that] buries All” (see chapter 4), and then Matthew Arnold to mourn in 1867 a world that “Hath neither joy, nor love, nor light, / Nor certitude, . . . / Where ignorant armies clash by night” (see chapter 6), and W. B. Yeats to cry out in 1920 that “Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold; / Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world.” This further turn of the wheel of modernity, a “fourth modernity,” in the last third of the twentieth century, moreover, soon set forth its own version of and rationale for democratic government that both sustained the analytic, reductionist tenor of the earlier modernities and repudiated the “universalisms” that it saw as having developed in them. It contested, that is, the Enlightenment universalism spawned by the first modernity and the liberal orthodoxy of the second modernity as well as, though less explicitly, the from-on-high predilections of the third modernity. In thus rejecting what it took to be inconsistent tendencies of a “will to a system” in other modernities, however, and in stoutly insisting on difference, “otherness,” and
deconstruction, postmodernism is, in fact, itself a fourth or supermodernism, skilled in critical analysis, and intent on parts (differentness) more than the whole. It is, one scholar observes, “the Cartesian critical intellect [at] its furthest point of development, . . . applying a systematic skepticism to every possible meaning.”

While questioning the entire Apollonian, Socratic, and post-Socratic tenor of Greek thought exalting the conscious, the logical, the scientific, the reasonable in human life and experience, Nietzsche emphasized instead the instinctual, the mythic, the subconscious, and the artistic dimensions. Socrates’ flaw, Nietzsche declared, was to uphold “theoretical man” and to sustain the “profound illusion . . . that thought, using the thread of causality, can penetrate the deepest abysses of being,” that one could “correct the world by knowledge, guide life by science, and actually confine the individual within the limited sphere of solvable problems.”

He argued further that the post-Darwinian, “scientific” thought of his day (second modernity) had, inconsistently, spawned “systems” of its own that proposed to “guide life by science” and otherwise impose orthodoxies and universalisms—what postmodernists would later term metanarratives. Nietzsche’s protest thus paralleled Bacon’s first modernity strictures on “ancient” Aristotelian and Aquin­ist deductive systems and Thorstein Veblen’s second modernity complaints that Adam Smith had abandoned first modernity empiricism by attempting to fashion “natural laws” of economics. To Nietzsche, the determined, rational system building of Comte and Marx and Spencer, and even the liberal “system” of J. S. Mill, re-created the “profound illusion” of rationalists from the time of Socrates that one could discern a “thread of causality” that encompassed human life and that set forth universal guidelines for its conduct. In the hands of those in power in modern, efficient states, these guidelines resulted in multiple oppressions built into all laws, institutions, rationales, and patterns of thought. Thus, even as mainstream, second modernity thinkers pursued their critical analysis of bourgeois rigidities and the genteel tradition, and traditionalists (and romantics) sought to “journey back to wholeness,” Nietzsche saw that, nonetheless, the (second) modernist tendency, after “the death of God,” was to “unfold, unravel, or unweave” and to “awaken the idea of primal difference or differentiation” that anticipates “twentieth century uncertainty.”

In On the Genealogy of Morals, outlining the emphasis in Western thought on themes of dominance and of will to “systems” and power, Nietzsche noted that “even with good old Kant: the categorical imperative smells of cruelty.” In The Antichrist, Nietzsche observed further: “A virtù arising purely from respect for the concept ‘virtue,’ as Kant desired it is noxious. . . . ‘[V]irtue,’ ‘duty’ . . . with the character of . . . universal validity . . . are . . . but phantasms. . . . Exactly the opposite principle is required if life is to expand and develop: that each man
should find his own virtue, his own categorical imperative." Kant's injunction to "act only... to will universal law" was merely another prescription and intervention impelled by an ideological and cultural will to universal behavior. The very words *categorical* and *imperative* reeked of dominion and authority—and the fact, furthermore, that they moved from German to English (and French) essentially without translation revealed the hegemony of Western thought and language. Martin Heidegger (1889–1976), the other forerunner, with Nietzsche, of late-twentieth-century postmodernism, bespoke a similar distaste for all forms of dominion and universalism that thus tended to suppress, ignore, or marginalize otherness, or "difference." Heidegger's thought can be understood only if one sees his preoccupation, as one student explains, with the "ubiquity of the finite" or, as another puts it, with "exploring how we should respond to otherness." The essence, if one can use that term in discussing postmodern thought, is not in any core or central or universal meaning or cosmology or even ethic but, rather, in all the difference and diversity that infuse human discourse and experience. Of course, then, God is dead, Kant's categorical imperative is a "cruel" hegemony, and all metaphysics is "exquisite moonshine," as George Santayana once remarked. Even the apparently open-ended and tolerant empiricisms of the "old liberal" John Locke and the "new liberal" John Dewey were merely more subtle (some would say insidious) impositions of enclosing worldviews that neglected or marginalized difference and otherness while seeming to welcome them. Their rationales for democracy, by seeming to enfold them in a system, were in fact as dogmatic, and as hostile to difference, as the "closed societies" of Plato and Marx themselves (see chapter 7).

Heidegger challenges what he terms *Gestell*, a broad aspect of Western thought that "has always envisioned action as being guided by reason... and sustained by will,... [a] narrow, essentially teleocratic conception... within which action is identified with the production of effects guided by strategic reason." This mode of thought, dominant in the West since Aristotle, has permeated, not only traditional or ancient understandings, but also the various modernities that have done no more than rearrange the universalisms and the categorized and excluded others. (Various oppressions and tyrannies and hegemonic states are the political analogue.) Heidegger urges instead a posture of *Nähe*, or "nearness," in which humans, profoundly aware of their own finitude, are simply "present" to others and aware of their differentness, where the "everyday chatter of willing and wanting subsides and we really become open to hearing one another." This requires "unlearning" the modes and discourses of "modernity: the increasingly one-sided cognitive-instrumental orientation to the world expressing itself in the pressures for societal rationalization." In this way, Heidegger's repudiation of the "mathematical conception of things," Man-
fred Stanley has noted, opposes a tradition in modern Western thought that includes Max Weber’s history of “rationalization,” the idea of “reification” in Marxist literature, and “instrumental reason” as discussed by the Frankfurt school. Oppositely, according to Stephen White, in Heidegger’s thinking, “the genuineness of community rests upon a radical willingness to hear and experience the difference of the other.”

Heidegger’s deep alienation from ubiquitous modern thought and culture, and his compulsion toward particularity and presentness, led him briefly to countenance Hitlerism as an alternative to universalizing, depersonal democratic liberalism (evoked brilliantly in, e.g., Herman Hesse’s Steppenwolf), but, in the long run, the political implications of his thought were no more than suggestive. His “other thinking,” basically “plural, unstable, motile, and unhierarchical,” led him away from any of the modern forms of the state, whether fascist, Communist, or democratic. Rather, his “political theory” seemed to require an elimination of all the processes and discourses of modern governments with their “teleocratic, technocratic disposition over words, deeds, and things.” In fact, he scorned all major twentieth-century tendencies and repudiated any sense of universal purpose or direction. “The darkening of the world, the flight of the gods, the destruction of the earth, the transformation of men into a mass, the hatred and suspicion of everything free and creative,” he said in 1935, “have assumed such proportions throughout the earth that such categories as pessimism and optimism have long since become absurd.” If there were no grounds for establishing preferable (to say nothing of universal) categories and not even any way, in being present to the “difference” that one faced on all sides, of distinguishing better from worse or a good direction from a bad, then it would seem that the whole realm of the political necessarily becomes at least problematic, if not overbearing, dangerous, and pathological.

If, as Heidegger once said, “in the most hidden ground of his essence, man is like a rose—without why,” then there is no need to compel acceptance or to legitimize, no responsibility to act, and no implication for collective action. Room is left for little more than a predilection for a devolved, small, radical democratic politics. Heidegger thus shares with Thomas Jefferson (first modernity), John Dewey (second modernity), and Fukuzawa Yukichi (third modernity) a sense of human equality and a defiance of privilege and hierarchy, but he repudiates their assumptions that reason, analysis, and criticism tend toward convergence (“will to a system”) and that societies can, thus, recognize common social purposes and move toward them politically—at least in any compulsive or elaborately organized way. Instead, Heidegger points (hesitantly and vaguely) toward “a small, radical democratic politics” that, by privileging “notions such as plurality, difference, motility, instability, dissemination, and lack of hier-
archy, . . . does not become entangled within new discourses about legitimacy or justice.” He thus seeks “a politics attuned to presencing . . . [that does] not initiate a new principal regime.”

Michel Foucault (1926–1984) in 1976, then well established as the successor to Jean-Paul Sartre and Claude Lévi-Strauss at the apex of Parisian intellectual life, picked up Heidegger’s theme of alienation from “dominant modes of discourse” by noting that, since about 1960, there had emerged “a sense of the increasing vulnerability to criticism of things, institutions, practices, discourses.” This pervasive vulnerability, Foucault declared, gave an “amazing efficacy [to] discontinuous, particular, and local criticism” (Heidegger’s difference and plurality) but, at the same time, encountered the powerful “inhibiting effect of global, totalitarian theories,” that is, the whole structure of Western thought, especially Enlightenment universalism. Foucault explains the Enlightenment (from Kant; Aufklärung) as “a singular event inaugurating European modernity and as a permanent process manifested in the history of reason, in the development and establishment of forms of rationality and technology, [and] the autonomy and authority of knowledge.” “The Enlightenment’s promise of attaining freedom through the exercise of reason,” Foucault asserted, had, in its “will to a system,” “been turned upside down, resulting in a domination by reason itself, which increasingly usurps the place of freedom.” He explained that the tendency toward “established forms of rationality” and “totalitarian theories” was also powerfully present in such more modern movements as Marxism and psychoanalysis (Freudianism) and had, as a result, “proved a hindrance to research . . . [of the] autonomous, noncentralized kind”—necessary if Heidegger’s emphasis on “plurality, difference, motility, instability, dissemination, and lack of hierarchy” was to achieve the presencing that contemporary circumstances required for it. A veritable “insurrection of subjugated knowledges” was needed, a surfacing from centuries of repression of the localized “historical contents,” “the ruptured effects of conflict and struggle, that the order imposed by functionalist or systematized thought is designed to mask.”

Foucault insists on setting aside all the formal, “juridical” studies of the past that use the language and techniques and assumptions and integrations of orthodox scholars and that, thus, form a “discourse” that is itself complicit in the dominant forces in society. Instead, there must be a search for “a particular, local, regional knowledge, a differential knowledge incapable of unanimity and which owes its force only to the harshness with which it is opposed by everything surrounding it.” It is “these local popular knowledges, these disqualified knowledges” (at least to conventional scholarship), Foucault declares, that must be reclaimed if human history is to be understood. This is not to formulate a new “unitary discourse” (which would simply institute another “functionalist
theory" of domination) but, rather, to “just go on, in a cumulative fashion,” to set forth a “genealogy” where, “on the basis of the descriptions of . . . local discursivities, subjected knowledges . . . would be released . . . [and] brought into play.” Foucault thus undertook searching studies of prisons, institutions for the “insane,” the control of human sexuality, and even schools, clinics, and psychiatric hospitals to reveal “lately liberated fragments” of how the increasingly pervasive institutions of the modern state (particularly since the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century rise of capitalism) actually impinged on, disciplined, and oppressed ordinary people. The “genealogies” of prisons and insane asylums, for example, examined from the standpoint of their effect on and categorization of the “inmates,” show the institutions to be instruments of control and discipline serving the needs of the dominant economic forces and political sovereignties. Schools, clinics, hospitals, and customs and laws regulating sexual behavior are no less oppressive, if more subtle, means of controlling deviations or differences subversive to dominant forces. The theories and ideologies, all tending more or less toward general, universal, “scientific” expression, that rationalized and justified and even criticized (from within) these institutions and practices were a “dominant discourse” that implicated social science and all other dimensions of modern, Enlightenment thought. (In this way, Foucault’s argument is a sort of follow-up on 1960s broadside attacks on the Establishment, paralleling his own sympathy for the radical politics of 1968 in France.) Not only did he condemn the pervasive bourgeois liberal thought of the West, but he saved particular scorn for Marxism and psychoanalysis, to him both prototypical universalisms. That “Soviet psychiatry is indeed the best in the world,” he observed in 1976, “is precisely that which one would hold against it.”

Instead, reflecting Heidegger’s profound alienation from what he took to be the systematizing, intrusive, controlling nature of the whole Western intellectual tradition from Plato onward, Foucault saw that tradition, and the institutions that it rationalized, as in complex relation to the power of dominant forces. One had to be wary especially of a “descending type of analysis” that sought to see causation go from the needs of the dominant bourgeois, capitalist forces to the pervasive mechanisms of discipline and control in modern society. (For example, reasoning that went from the need for an orderly, submissive workforce to justifying institutionalizing the “insane.”) Instead, “what needs to be done is something quite different,” Foucault insisted. One needed to investigate, historically, locally, and “at the lowest level, how mechanisms of power have been able to function.” “Families, parents, doctors, etc.” had to be studied “in precise conjuncture” to see “the mechanisms of exclusion that are necessary, the apparatuses of surveillance, the medicalization of sexuality, of madness, of delinquency, all the micromechanisms of power, that came, from
a certain moment in time, to represent the interests of the bourgeoisie.” At this “certain moment in time,” the reasons for which Foucault said needed to be studied, these mechanisms of exclusion and control (applied, e.g., to madness and “deviant sexuality”) began “to reveal their political usefulness and to lend themselves to economic profit . . . [so that] they came to be colonized and maintained by global mechanisms” embodied in “the entire state system” of the world. This dominant worldwide hegemony (the liberal corporate state of the twentieth century [see chapter 7]), Foucault explained, was interested, not in madness or infantile sexuality in order to “treat” or “cure” them or even to understand their “differentness,” but rather in the power that is exercised by “the complex of mechanisms with which delinquency [of various kinds] is controlled, pursued, punished, and reformed, etc.”

In pursuing this focus on the actual, pervasive exercise of power in modern society and the modern state, Foucault accorded fundamental importance to “the production of effective instruments for the formation and accumulation of knowledge—methods of observation, techniques of registration, procedures for investigation and research, apparatuses of control.” Power came to be “exercised through these subtle mechanisms” of thought, which become part of “the techniques and tactics of domination.” These “mechanisms” and approaches to study were, Foucault pointed out, the assumptions and the methods of second modernity social scientists. Their research, theories, and policy analysis (“discourse”) provided the undergirding and compulsive (universalizing) rationale for the observations, investigations, and registrations that, bureaucratized, became the means of power and control by the dominant social forces. Conventional languages of rights and formal “juridical” power were used and incorporated (or, rather, co-opted), but, as the techniques and discourses of the social sciences exert their authority, there comes into play, Foucault asserts, “the global functioning of what I would call a society of normalization.” These “procedures of normalization,” given authority by the “dominant discourse” of social science (or liberalism, or structuralism, or Marxism), moreover, increasingly invade and supersede the formal meaning of rights and of “welfare”; in Foucault’s language, they “engage in the colonization of [the precepts] of law.” The result is a pervasive system that controls and oppresses any “nonnormal,” different, “other” element in society. This happens, not only through the institutions and procedures of the modern corporate state, but more fundamentally through the “discourse,” the psychology and social data and theories of the orthodox (second modernity) intellectuals, that rationalizes and authorizes, in the form of allegedly objective and universal guidelines, the interests and institutions of dominant power.

In critiquing this pervasive and “colonizing” style of thinking, Foucault com-
plains that it engages in only “the illusion of autonomous discourse.” For him, there is simply no such thing as research, analysis, or theory that is in any way either objective or “free” from the subjugating influence or perspective of the narrator. In fact, any claim of objectivity is alienating because, by bringing the allegedly unbiased state of mind of the narrator into the discourse, it also excludes by not simply presencing the subject and not allowing for its difference—thus engaging in profound oppression of Heidegger’s otherness. The very claims for neutrality and scientific objectivity, that is, serve only to require “others” to accept intellectual foundations that assume that universally valid, unparticularized concepts can exist. Foucault sees the history of Europe since the sixteenth century, and especially since the eighteenth, as a series of events where the need for universalizing (creating “sameness”) has, in a kind of Hegelian dialectic, repeatedly also created “the Other.” Hence, for example, the elimination by modern science of one excluded Other, leprosy, required the creation of another, madness, which then had to be defined, enclosed, and “treated” with the allegedly objective but actually alienated and alienating techniques of modern psychiatry—in effect, exclusion and oppression. The emergence of clinical medicine subjected bodily illness to the same sort of “objectifying gaze” from the “expert” physician, while the modern prison, on Bentham’s model of the “panoptic” (all-seeing) penitentiary, similarly subjected the “inmates” to the observation and corrective measures of the dominant ideology. In all cases, there was a “political technology” at work, one that “serves to reform prisoners, ... treat patients, instruct school children, confine the insane, supervise workers, [and] put beggars and idlers to work” and is applied “whenever one is dealing with a multiplicity of individuals on whom a task or a particular form of behavior must be imposed.” In no case were the “others” seen or even present in their own terms; instead, they were classified and objectified in ways that enhanced the controlling ideologies and institutions of the dominant power. Everything—organizations, bureaucracies, ideologies, and especially language and methods of research, explanation, and categorization (“discourse”)—was implicated in the “will to power” of the dominant class. Again, in Heideggerian terms, rather than encountering difference as difference, there was always the attempt “to enclose it within identity” as defined by the (objective, universal) paradigms of the ruling order.

In his *Madness and Civilization* (1961), Foucault tried to recapture “the experience of madness” before its “objective” categorization in the late eighteenth century through the “invention” of psychology and psychiatry, which “thrust into oblivion all those stammered, imperfect words without fixed syntax in which the exchange between madness and reason was made.” The claim of the social and medical scientists to be observing with “a trained and neutral eye” was utterly false and had the effect both of concealing the “undifferentiated
experience” of madness and of subjugating the constructed (by the psycholo-
gists) experience to the canons of the dominant order. The developing disci-
plines of psychology and psychiatry, then, were rife with a “scientific pretension
and theoretical blindness, . . . committed to a positivistic methodology in which
measuring, counting, and calculating took a pride of place” that made them
worthless, misleading, and dangerous. The result was a deeply flawed, self-
aggrandizing, totalitarian ideology masquerading as “science.” (One is reminded
of Veblen’s attack on the classical economics of Adam Smith, supposedly drawn
from the enlightened knowledge and scientific understanding of the eighteenth
century. Smith and his successors were “not satisfied with a formulation of
mechanical sequence” [narrative in postmodern terms], Veblen pointed out,
but had to exercise “some sort of coercive surveillance over the sequence of
events, . . . to formulate knowledge in terms of absolute truth . . . [and] natural
law.” Instead, Veblen called for a “habit of mind which seeks a comprehen-
sion of facts in terms of cumulative sequence . . . that leaves no place for a forma-
tion of natural laws in terms of definitive normality” [see chapter 6]. That is, this
second modernity charge against Enlightenment compulsion toward natural
law clearly parallels Foucault’s fourth modernity condemnation of Enlighten-
ment and even of second modernity universalism.)

Foucault argues that the development of Western thought and society in the
nineteenth and twentieth centuries (i.e., since the Enlightenment and the Industrial
Revolution) has followed a twofold course. On the one hand, a “heterogeneous”
path exists between a “superimposed” ideology of rights and a “democratization of
sovereignty,” that is, the idealized view of the liberal corporate state. On the other
hand, a “closely linked grid of disciplinary coercions also exists whose purpose is
in fact to assure the cohesion” of a society that otherwise, through its “rights” and
“democratic sovereignty” aspects, tends toward disorder and autonomy. But it is
this “grid of disciplinary coercions,” this “polymorphous disciplinary mecha-
nism,” that actually exercises power in a modern polity and enforces a “normal-
ization” according to universal guidelines that sustain the dominant (oppressive,
privileged) forces. These disciplinary forces, moreover, “engender . . . appara-
tuses of knowledge,” a “discourse of the human sciences” that “invades” the
realm, or discourse, of rights and popular sovereignty in a way that “colonizes” it,
renders it subservient to the needs of the “normalizing” dominant power. It is
this invading, colonizing, “scientific” way of thinking, this “will to a system,”
dominant in the West especially since the Enlightenment, that enforces and cate-
gorizes all difference and otherness (in its own terms) and, thus, constitutes “the
general mechanism of power in our society.”

Foucault declares, however, that it is a “blind alley” to attempt to oppose or
struggle against the controlling, disciplinary, oppressive mechanisms of power
in the modern state by appealing to the rights and sovereignty of the people. Their constitutive institutions and patterns of thought (schools, “correctional” institutions, corporate capitalism, political theory, judicial system, etc.) have been so co-opted that they have become “absolutely integral” parts of the dominant discourse. It is no good, that is, to use the language of rights and democratic sovereignty to oppose the dominion and oppression since that language (discourse) accepts and “thinks within” the very paradigms that also undergird the “normalizing mechanism,” the universalizing social scientific “apparatuses of knowledge” of both the first and the second modernities. There is no point, for example, in trying to improve treatment of prisoners and those accused of crimes by appealing to their “rights” because the very concept of rights assumes and accepts the existence of a state that must somehow “protect” the rights but that is, actually, always at the disposal of oppressive forces. Instead, Foucault suggests, “if one wants to look for a non-disciplinary form of power, or rather, to struggle against disciplines and disciplinary power, it is not towards the ancient right of sovereignty (even popular sovereignty) that one should turn, but towards the possibility of a new form of right, one which must indeed be anti-disciplinarian, but at the same time liberated from the principle of sovereignty”—and, perhaps more profoundly, liberated from “a system of psychological reference points borrowed from the human sciences.” Following Nietzsche, Bonnie Honig finds the answer in the fact that “politics,” in the grand sense of a people in struggle and conflict finding their way to fulfillment, “is one of the casualties of modernity, and its preoccupation with acquisition, safety, and salvation... Human beings have changed... Politics in modernity [the liberal corporate state] has been all too successful in its project of containment, control, and disempowerment,” especially of the Other. The path, then, that postmodern liberating government must take (if, indeed, it can in justice “govern” at all) is toward some “new form of right,” some new understanding of what justice means, and away from the very idea of sovereignty, the principle that there should be an ultimate, controlling power, a “state” at all, in 2000 and beyond — Locke, Jefferson, Mill, and Dewey invalidated, as are, of course, East Asian ideas of the state as the highest embodiment of civilization.

Antifoundationalism and Deconstruction: Lyotard and Derrida

Jean-François Lyotard (1925–1998) sustains Foucault’s search for (nonhegemonic) “new forms of right” and reformulations of the idea of sovereignty by emphasizing the ad hoc, the contextual, and the local. He scorns particularly the modern “mythologies” of Enlightenment “liberation” of humanity from political constraints and triumph over physical ones and of post-Hegelian quest for
the speculative unity of all knowledge. By their very intellectual methodology ("discourse style"), these mythologies enfold and co-opt, or exclude, marginalize, stigmatize, and oppress difference and otherness by attempting to bring everything within allegedly universal guidelines and paradigms. Hence, Lyotard summarizes, "I define postmodern as incredulity toward metanarratives," the latter his term for all the "hegemonic" philosophizing and theorizing of the Western intellectual tradition, up to and including both the Marxist-Leninist and the liberal democratic ideologies current in the twentieth century. Lyotard rejects "Newtonian anthropology," including such modern constructs as systems theory and structuralism that "follow a logic which implies ... that the whole is determinable . . . [and that] allocate our lives for the growth of power." So, Lyotard asks, after the exposure ("deconstruction") of these metanarratives, "Where can legitimacy reside?" "Consensus obtained through discussion" (e.g., à la Jürgen Habermas) is out because it "does violence to the heterogeneity of language games," that is, to the necessarily subjective and partial nature of all theories, explanations, conclusions, and rationales. Rather, "postmodern knowledge, . . . not simply a tool of the authorities, refines our sensitivity to differences and reinforces our ability to tolerate the incommensurable."26 (The affinity to Heidegger is evident here.)

Applied to social and political understanding, emphasis is turned toward the plural, the local, and "a justice of multiplicities." "The discourse of law and that of the State," all political inquiry in the Western tradition, Lyotard asserts, is based on a "presupposition which guarantees that there is meaning to know and thus confers legitimacy upon history." All political "statements" have their own "speculative language" derived from a supposed meaningfulness that excludes other discourses—all sustained by "The University, [which] as its name indicates, is its exclusive institution." That is, the self-proclaimed higher learning is itself deeply complicit in the "language game" of validating the dominant power and marginalizing all others. The "crisis," however, "accumulating since the end of the nineteenth century" and related to the "progress in technology and the expansion of capitalism," rests most fundamentally on "an internal erosion of the legitimate principle of knowledge [itself] . . . , an erosion at work inside the speculative game." Thus, "disciplines disappear; . . . the speculative hierarchy of learning gives way to an immanent, . . . 'flat' network of areas of inquiry."27 The political dimension of this is the disappearance of any single, overarching theory of justice or even a legitimate foundation for the state at all—what Bonnie Honig sees as the inadmissibility of "the would-be perfect closures of god, self-evidence, law, identity, or community." Instead, as another scholar explains it, there is a needed sense of "a decentralized plurality of democratic, self-managing groups and institutions whose
members problematize the norms of their practice and take responsibility for modifying them as situations require.” Though Lyotard is hesitant about pursuing or systematizing political “knowledges,” there is, nonetheless, a strong affinity between the delegitimizing of the whole Western “speculative game” and a tendency politically toward a decentralized “justice of multiplicities.” In another hint of how to escape a mere morass of “multiplicities,” Lyotard states that “what brings us out of capital and out of ‘art’ [modern conceptions] . . . is not criticism, which is language bound, nihilistic, but a deployment of libidinal investment”—presumably, the emotional and egotistical (*Dionysian* in Nietzsche’s categories) rather than the rational.

Moving in a way that he regards as more fundamentally postmodern, more deeply repudiating of Apollonian “logocentrism” (the emphasis on reason, light, and system in Western thought since Socrates), Jacques Derrida (b. 1930) explains: “The concept of centered structure is in fact the concept of a play [of words] based on a fundamental ground, on . . . a reassuring certitude, which itself is beyond the reach of [such] play.” All the notions, even the slightest hints, including those in a generally postmodern mode, that suggest anything like the “centered structure” typical of traditional inquiry (including political) reflect a proclivity for “reassuring certitude” and “fundamental ground” that is simply out of place, inherently inadmissible and illegitimate, in postmodernity. Derrida thus insists, for example, that Foucault’s claim to have written a history of “madness itself . . . before being captured by knowledge,” that is, to have set forth a genealogy, a narrative, of the actual experience of madness before its scientific “discovery” and (mis)explanation by scholars during and since the Enlightenment, is itself a complicit manifestation of the language of reason. “All our European languages, the language of everything that has participated, from near or far, in the adventure of Western reason,” Derrida explains, “nothing within this language can escape the historical guilt” of logocentrism. Even all the critique and condemnation that “the postmodern condition” directs at the Enlightenment and modernity, supposedly from outside the dominant tradition, is not a repudiation but actually a further, if highly sophisticated, engagement in the language game of objectifying universal reason—logocentrism. Thus, Derrida concedes that a reasoned critique of modernity, in the mode of Foucault, Lyotard, and others, is meaningless and impossible (as well as complicit) because it accepts the language games, the social science methodology, of the dominant power.

Allan Megill points out that, if, following Nietzsche, “God is dead, then we all live in secondariness.” Derrida names this secondariness *writing*. That is, all that remains after the demise of universal and final meaning, and after all the multitudes of logocentrisms and language games that in Western thought have
elaborated and legitimized them, are the words themselves. “Texts” are simply “there,” to be deconstructed, but not with the idea of, “through the manipulation of words and letters, to find a path back . . . to God” and to meaning. Rather, “Derrida takes the manipulation of words and letters as something close to an end in itself; for Derrida there is nothing beyond the letter, no primal voice speaking a long-concealed truth.” By attacking the messenger, the language and text itself, so to speak, Derrida in effect renders the message (the theory, the universal idea) nonexistent. Deconstruction is, then, not a method of manipulation, or criticism, finding meaning, or a progressive evolution, or a dialectic of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis (logocentrism), but rather a way “to make a given text mean anything at all”—or nothing—thus denying “the priority of text over interpretation.” “Text was reduced to pretext” where all that was left was the deconstruction itself, the text having been “nullified.” “The text to be interpreted becomes . . . the product of its own supposed exegesis. Interpretation . . . becomes an end in itself, no longer seeking justification in its attempt to reveal the meaning hidden in an ‘original text’”—because there is no (larger?) meaning in the text and, in any case, there is no language game (discourse) capable of elaborating meanings even if they existed.

Thus, in repudiating the whole logocentric tradition of Western thought, its dominating expression in the Enlightenment, and even its critique by postmodern thinkers (especially Foucault, who, Derrida asserts, fell into the very logocentric trap that he faulted in others), Derrida in a sense brings postmodern thought full circle—one might say to its logical conclusion (though Derrida, of course, would deny the very ideas of logical or of conclusion). The words, the “texts” of the Western tradition (and, presumably, of other logocentric traditions such as Islam and Confucianism), are deconstructed to have no rational or objective meaning(s), thus losing their significance and their “priority” over the words of the deconstructing critic. But these words, like all other “word games,” are without communicability except as manifestations of the subjective existence of the deconstructor. The American Declaration of Independence is, for Derrida, no more than a “fabulous retroactivity” where the signers have “invented” themselves, as founders, by adding, after the fact really, a “constative,” the “Laws of Nature and of Nature’s God,” to the “performative utterance” “We hold,” which they had seemed to declare, as the grounds for what they had done—simply what had happened. That is, the “self-evident truths” were there because they were “held” by “we,” that is, the signers; that’s all. The Declaration, thus, was essentially a word game, without meaning, until deconstructed by another “subjectivity” such as Derrida himself. In any case, the notion that the Declaration and the Constitution, which claimed to rest on it for ultimate authority, were somehow legitimately foundational, resting on univer-
sal, natural law, was a mere fable of some self-appointed “signers.” Again, criticism has been “prioritized” over text in a way that leaves the text itself without meaning. Hence, courses studying any allegedly canonical text, for example, will ordinarily read much more criticism than text itself because all there is to understand is not in the text itself but in the situation and method of the criticism that has engaged in the deconstruction. The impact on political inquiry of any kind is even more destabilizing and disorienting than was the case for the “earlier postmodernists” whom Derrida challenges (he repudiates the enterprise of postmodernism and the label postmodern often designated to him). For him, there is simply no way to entertain intelligibly the traditional questions of political inquiry or to evaluate the nature of political regimes—except to negate (deconstruct) all previous commentaries and all existing regimes.

The result is a language of “politics” and an understanding of “democracy” (the words themselves lose customary connotations in postmodern discourse) that deny foundationalism in theories of reality, in concepts of human nature, and in ideas of history, resting, instead, on contingency, pluralism, and difference. The world is a place of “agglomerate possibilities” without necessary order where what has happened and what might happen form no pattern and are finally indeterminate anyhow. Hence, the realm of political thinking is understood as one of acceptance and invention where being open to and creating new possibilities are much more in order than understanding or applying any existing ideology or practice. In looking at the world, one sees a “plurality of heterogeneous spaces” that spawn a “plurality of cultures and discourses.”

Thus, there is no possible master plan for the world, no political ideal (such as democracy) to which all societies might or should aspire, and no universal concepts of justice. All that can be hoped for, even facing death, is a “few rules that can help us move about our existence in a non-chaotic and undisorganized way while knowing that we are not headed anywhere.”

The role of the political theorist, contra Plato, Locke, or Marx, is not to evaluate and set forth ideals of justice or other political conceptions but, rather, to interpret texts with complex analyses open to challenge and to facilitate communication across diverse and autonomous traditions, that is, to acknowledge and respect difference. The result is both a politics of identity and a politics of difference where any (heterogeneous) identity is at once defined and undermined by its difference. That is, any group finds part of its own particular identity through its various contacts (migration, conquest, secession, oppression, etc.) with other groups and is, at the same time, made aware of how its identity is not special (a chosen people), or universal, but simply different. Since this vital process of differentiation always takes place within an interplay of dominant and subordinated groups and forces, however, politics in some degree must be
more than cognizant of differences. It must as well encourage and foster differen-
tness rather than hegemony, especially among the myriad oppressed (marginal-
ized) groups, in ways that nourish multiculturalism—*democratic cosmopolitanism*,
as Bonnie Honig terms it (see below). Apart from this differentiated group iden-
tity, which is understood both to separate groups and to provide important bonds
among individuals within them, postmodern political thought resists any concep-
tion of a self-willed, rational, autonomous person. Rather, it speaks of “subjects”
who are “regarded as complex combinations of relatively random components . . .
patched together out of a variety of different bits of values, identities, and beliefs;
dispersed or decentred . . . creative . . . inventive in ways unknown to the modern-
ist subject.”

**Oppression, Marginality, and the Politics of Identity**

Though this critical, deconstructive approach to the political realm, with its
opposition to theory and systems and universals (metanarratives), tends power-
fully to repel any broad understanding, or reformulation, or refounding of dem-
ocratic government, political conceptions can be expressed in a postmodern
way. The whole, postmodern political commentary, moreover, though expressed
originally by German and, recently, especially French thinkers, has had major
reference to the mainly Anglo-American “liberal” ideology (second modernity).
In *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (1990), for example, the American theorist
Iris Young elaborates “a positive sense of group difference and a politics that
attends to rather than represses difference,” which, she declares, “owes much
to . . . such postmodern writers as Derrida, Lyotard, Foucault, and Kristeva.”
She thus “appropriates a critique of unifying discourse to analyze and criticize
such concepts as impartiality, the general good, and community.” “What are the
implications for political philosophy,” she asks, “of postmodern philosophy’s
challenge to the tradition of Western reason?” (Many other challenges, with
often similar arguments, could be cited, of course.)

Young focuses this “challenge” on the idea of “distributive justice” as it had
come to be rationalized and practiced in the liberal corporate state (what Young
terms the *welfare corporate society*) of the twentieth century. Questions of participa-
tion and of justice, or fairness, were there resolved “in a context of interest-group
pluralism where each group competes for its share of public resources”—precisely
the notion of conflict-of-interest politics explained by Arthur Bentley in 1908
(see chapter 6) and embodied in the practice and theory of democratic govern-
ment in most of the world during the twentieth century (see chapter 7). For
Young, this model of self-government has two “normative defects.” First, its
“privatized [self-interested] form of representation and decisionmaking” does
not require any “appeal to justice” and, thus, tends to see all expressions of interest as equally worthy in pursuit of particular goals. Second, inequalities in the “resources, organization, and power” of the various (all legitimated) interest groups allowed some to dominate while others had little or no voice, thus undermining the principle of equal access to political power in an allegedly democratic system.37

Hence, Young proposes a different understanding of justice that, while responsive to postmodern ideas of otherness and differentiation, nonetheless retains grounds for distinguishing among claims for influence: “Justice [is] the institutionalized conditions that make it possible for all to learn and use satisfying skills in socially recognized settings, to participate in decisionmaking, and to express their feelings, experience, and perspective on social life in contexts where others can listen.” Thus, Young moves toward a politics where justice is understood in terms of “institutionalized conditions” or “socially recognized settings,” that is, in terms of groups. These groups, moreover, have been formed by social and cultural circumstances, by response to dominating values, and by institutions that at once oppress and differentiate and internally solidify the group. Thus, race and gender and sexual orientation, for example, are understood, not as hereditary or biological “facts,” but rather as social constructs flowing from the history (narrative) and experience of the group. This narrative and experience, though much varied among and between groups, nonetheless produces five general categories of oppression: “exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence.” (These were the experiences, of course, of the “insane,” the imprisoned, the “sexually deviant,” and the other oppressed groups whose “genealogies” Foucault had narrated.) The disadvantages and oppressions that these groups have felt and continue to feel, moreover, in the United States and other “democratic” countries, at least, come, “not because a tyrannical power coerces them, but because of the everyday practices of a well-intentioned liberal society.”38 Justice, that is, is not something to be “established” to accord with universal norms (as, e.g., the U.S. Constitution implies) but, rather, something that is understood as a response to the various habituated and institutionalized experiences of groups within a dominant culture. It is, thus, in a way both beyond government and sustained by it in myriad ways that make a mockery of the ideological pretensions of liberal democracy.

Young lists, “among others, women, Blacks, Chicanos, Puerto Ricans and other Spanish-speaking Americans, American Indians, Jews, lesbians, gay men, Arabs, Asians, old people, working-class people, and the physically and mentally disabled” as “social groups” that experience one or more categories of oppression. Justice then means, first and foremost, the alleviation of the marginalization, or the powerlessness, or the cultural imperialism, and so on, afflicting these
and other groups. Old people who are “laid off from their jobs and cannot find new work,” young people, especially blacks or Latinos “who cannot find first or second jobs,” single mothers “involuntarily employed,” and American Indians on reservations, for example, are oppressed by “marginalization,” being excluded from the means of livelihood and fulfillment in society. Working people lacking “professional” certification and, thus, denied status and respect, and women kept from promotion because of their gender, suffer from a “powerlessness” not experienced by professional white males. Perhaps most insidiously oppressive of all is “cultural imperialism,” where the dominant group in a society (in the United States, white, professional, heterosexual males) imposes its norms on all others. Thus, differences such as those of “women from men, American Indians or Africans from Europeans, Jews from Christians, homosexuals from heterosexuals, workers from professionals, become reconstructed largely as deviance and inferiority.” The various forms of oppression, moreover, not only separate the experience of these groups from that of the dominant culture, but also heighten “a sense of positive subjectivity” within the group that defines its own understanding of justice. What W. E. B. Du Bois called a double consciousness, a “sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity,” “devalued, objectified, [and] stereotyped,” brands the oppressed groups as “different, marked, or inferior.” This experience and double consciousness, however, create a sensibility and power within the group that both define its conception of justice and propel it against the norms of the dominant group. These groups must be understood, then, as the basic units in society and the foundation of the definition and quest for justice in any polity.

Though, like most postmodern thinkers, Young is deeply critical of liberal democracies as they exist in the United States and elsewhere, she sees some hope that, with major changes, a politics of difference might grow in them. Two particular revised directions are required. First, there must be “a positive sense of group difference, . . . which might be called democratic cultural pluralism, . . . [where] there is equality among socially and culturally differentiated groups, who mutually respect one another and affirm one another in their differences.” In this understanding, at the core of one’s sense of identity and fulfillment as a human being, one’s “social existence,” is “attachment to specific traditions, practices, language, and other culturally specific forms.” The essence of oppression in human history, especially the implicit forms common in liberal democratic societies, is that, “in everyday interactions, images, and decisions, assumptions about women, Blacks, Hispanics, gay men and lesbians, old people, and other marked groups continue to justify exclusion, avoidance, paternalism, and authoritarian treatment.” To correct this, not only must the
oppressed groups ("often an 'affinity group' in a given situation with whom I feel most comfortable"), constructed in part by the very exclusions and denials that they have experienced, be acknowledged and accepted (Heidegger's otherness), but their self-identity, their social cohesion, their organization, and their "voice" in public affairs must be actively nourished and encouraged. Only then can any regime be meaningfully participatory and truly rest on the consent of the governed. Any political understanding that denies this and assumes, instead, that citizens are or should be rational, autonomous decisionmakers oriented toward universal ideals or the common good, or even assumes "rational choice" by individuals or special interests and then expects compromise among them, simply misunderstands and abuses the very nature of the political. Rather, given the realities of social existence in contemporary societies, group identities (especially of oppressed groups) must be heightened and foregrounded if there is to be justice.41

Second, as oppressed groups develop in their sense of identity, in their understanding of their just needs, in their social skills and organization, and in their orientation toward public affairs, they must also have a guaranteed voice in the public life of the polity. "In group-differentiated societies," Young observes, "conflict, factionalism, divisiveness, civil warfare, do often occur between groups." But, since these conflicts are caused mainly by "relations of domination and oppression . . . that produce resentment, hostility, and resistance" and that privilege those already skilled at manipulating and exercising power, the oppressed groups must have a special voice, perhaps even a veto, in matters of public policy that especially affect them. Thus, "a democratic public should provide mechanisms for the effective recognition and representation of the distinct voices and perspectives of those of its constituent groups that are oppressed or disadvantaged" (emphasis added). "Public resources" should support the "self-organization of group members . . . [to] achieve collective empowerment" and an understanding of where their experience and interests fit in society. Then, institutions are needed where group analysis, group perspectives, and group generation of policy are listened to, deliberated on, and taken into account when decisions are made. Finally, there must be "group veto power regarding specific policies that affect a group directly, such as reproductive rights policy for women, or land use policy for Indian reservations." Democracy thus means that otherness must be acknowledged and valued, that justice and equality are defined and understood as arising from the "narrative" and experience of oppressed groups, that these groups are made visible and given voice in ways suited to their cultural norms, though not necessarily in the privileged, articulated ways of the dominant group. Finally, groups must themselves have a decisive voice on policy questions affecting
them most directly—even if that means something other than majority rule
where that is merely the will of the dominant group.42 (The idea is perhaps
something like John C. Calhoun’s notion of “concurrent majorities” where
measures must gain not only the overall majority vote in a legislature but also
the “concurring majority” of the representatives of the group most directly
affected, as, e.g., representatives of fishermen, frontier farmers, or textile work­
ers and cotton planters on, respectively, fishing rights treaties, land prices, and
tariffs on imported cloth.)43

Young defends these procedures as different from and preferable to conven­
tional “interest-group pluralism” (or conflict-of-interest politics) in that they
require, not merely advocacy of self-interest and strategic compromise, but also
deliberations that require explanations of the “social justice” grounds of the
proposed perspectives and policies. She also insists that giving groups “veto
power over policies that fundamentally and uniquely affect members of their
group” will not necessarily simply stall decisionmaking but might facilitate and
even “justify” it by altering “the structured relations of privilege and oppres­
sion.” That is, people in oppressed groups, nourished, encouraged, and empow­
ered to speak up and take part, by surfacing differences and conflicts, might
enlarge overall understanding, identify points of convergence among previously
oppressed and silent groups, and altogether level the playing field so that the
engagement can proceed fairly. Even stalled decisionmaking might sometimes
be “just” if it prevented the imposition of oppressive policies by the (previously)
dominant group44—justice being understood as arising from the experience and
felt needs of various oppressed groups, rather than as conformity to universal
principles. John Dewey, of course, in another modernity, had made somewhat
the same point in repudiating all conceptions of natural law.

In condemning universalism and upholding “democratic cosmopolitan­
ism,” Bonnie Honig raises the question of how much citizenship in a demo­
cratic nation might require allegiance to and even affection for the polity and for
its allegedly universal principles—as, in the United States, “I pledge allegiance to
the flag . . . and to the republic for which it stands” or in the pledges in natural­
ization rites and officeholding to honor and defend the Constitution. To Honig,
this puts legal immigrants in the position of being valued “givers” of loyalty,
energy, and productivity as they take up residence and become citizens. Illegal
immigrants, including exploited migrant workers, are, on the other hand, seen
as “takers,” who, while contributing an “instrumental” productivity, take away
from the affective loyalty that a committed citizenship embodies. Thus, what
Honig calls “the myth of an immigrant America” sustains a view of the good or
“model” immigrant who is welcome as over against the “bad” immigrant who
needs to be deprivileged or sent away.
Honig wonders whether this myth might be “redeployed as part of a counter-politics of foreignness”—perhaps a version of Heidegger’s presencing of otherness or of Young’s politics of difference. Instead of supposing that the immigrant, legal or illegal, needs to be required to subscribe to the national myth by becoming a citizen of the democratic nation and taking part in its political practices (and sent away if he or she does not), Honig urges that democracy be understood as taking place prior to citizenship and in the act of being present in a place, even though outside national institutions. The ideas of membership in a polity and the assumption, thus, of political obligation, as in Lockean thinking, are absent. By his or her possession of a worthy cultural pluralism (prior to corruption by a greedy, self-centered, passive American consumer culture), the immigrant is positioned to act democratically (and patriotically) simply by being on the scene and able to act outside the flawed (non)democratic institutions set to coerce and require national membership. Thus, the “expansion of alien suffrage,” for example, might encourage a “democratic cosmopolitanism” usefully corrective to the exclusion of diversity present in “Americanization” processes. “Promoting social and worker movements,” Honig supposes further, “might help win for presently unrepresented populations a voice in institutional self-governance as well as greater autonomy in daily life.” Finally, to further “denationalize democracy,” Honig urges support for “transnational” groups such as Women Living under Islamic Law, Amnesty International, and Greenpeace that hold nations “accountable for their treatments of persons and public goods.” The point of this “democratic cosmopolitanism,” she concludes, “is not to replace the state with an international government,” since the state was “an important potential and actual organizer of social welfare and justice as well as a potentially powerful ally to [struggling] citizens and groups.” Rather, the need is for “social democrats to find ways to offset the still too singular power of the state.” Instead, for example, of illegal immigrants being “criminalized and denationalized” by democratic nations (as often happens), their social and political energies should be mobilized into effective, probably transnational, action against the dominant not-really-democratic power—“workers [and migrants] of the world unite?”

Honig’s postmodern view of the state, especially the United States, then, is scorn for its past and present self-proclaimed but misnamed democratic liberalism and hope for ways to diminish the oppression and authoritarianism of its ideology and institutions—in the manner of Foucault. As with Lyotard, Young, and many other postmodern political theorists, the argument is not necessarily to abolish the state, or to turn away from the democratic form, but rather to seek ways to radically decentralize, populize, or even disempower it. These latter intentions are not completely foreign to second modernity democratic think-
ing, of course, but, because of assumptions of (according to Megill) “cultural crisis, a derelict present, [and] a nothing out of which everything must be created,” the postmodern version of them focuses much more on criticism (deconstruction) than on reconstructive ideology or institution building.

**Postmodern Democracy**

Honig and Young seek to reconceive American democracy in what Young terms “a critique of the ideal of universal citizenship” and Honig calls the “too abstract universalism of America’s democratic constitutionalism.” “A general perspective does not exist,” Young states, flatly denying Enlightenment universalism, “that all persons can adopt and from which all experiences and perspectives can be understood. . . . The existence of social groups implies different, though not necessarily exclusive, histories, experiences, and perspectives . . . and implies that they do not entirely understand the experience of other groups. No one can claim to speak in the general interest.” The classical and Enlightenment models of rational citizens discerning the common good and applying universal principles of justice in their participation in public affairs (discussion, voting, officeholding, jury duty, community activism, etc.) are irrelevant in modern “group-differentiated societies,” not only because many “citizens” are ignorant or biased, but also, and more basically, because there simply are no such principles. Any claims to them are only the “self-deceiving, self-interested” views of dominant groups, which always tend “to assert their own perspective as universal.” Young and Honig thus echo Nietzsche’s assertions that “the will to a system is a lack of integrity” and that Kant’s “categorical imperative smells of cruelty,” Heidegger’s insistence on “otherness” and “difference,” Foucault’s repudiation of “the inhibiting effect of global, totalitarian theories,” and Lyotard’s “incredulity toward metanarratives.” Postmodern conceptions of democracy, then, reject explicitly the Enlightenment ideals of natural (universal) law that undergirded first modernity democracy and the U.S. Constitution, the “scientific” reformulation of those principles in second modernity democracy, the universal-tending institutions and processes of the liberal corporate state of the twentieth century, and East Asian ideas of government resting on any modernized (including Communist) version of the mandate of heaven.

In fact, in a way harking back to the chasm between the Aristotelian and the Confucian understandings of government and modern, liberal, post-Hobbes-Locke ones, postmodernists simply approach the realm of the political and see the nature of the state differently—from both “ancients” and “moderns” (see chapters 2 and 4). “If by democracy one means,” theorizes Honig, “a set of arrangements that perpetually generates popular (both local and global) politi-
cal action as well as generating the practices that legitimate representative institutions,” then the assumption by those whom she terms virtue theorists (Kant, John Rawls, and Michael Sandel, e.g.) “that it is possible and desirable to contain or expel the disruptions of [conflictual] politics has antidemocratic reso-

cnces.” That is, when seekers after universal ideals of self-government, whether Enlightenment believers in natural law or modernist upholders of conflict-containing (and enfolding) democratic processes, have their way, the Other, which is always present in any configuration of public life, “is then dehuman-
ized, criminalized, or ostracized” by an (otherwise inclusive) political commu-
nity. The “outside others,” the “remainders” of any and every real political process (always productive of argument and conflict), are “depoliticalized” by the “disavowing [of] their political genealogy [i.e., group identity, in Young’s terms], function, or significance.” Hence, the democratic rationales of the first and second modernities are, in their efforts to enshrine themselves in natural law or liberal metanarratives, in effect “antidemocratic.” The understandings of government as embodied in the U.S. Constitution, the “refounding” of the American polity in the Progressive era, and the British social democracy of the twentieth century, for example (see chapters 5 and 6), by “displacing politics with bureaucratic administration, jurocratic rule, or communitarian consolida-
tion,” have simply betrayed politics by substituting the “cruelty” of hegemonic rules (government itself?) for the conflict and populist unfolding (not enfolding) of real politics. A postmodern “democratic politics of augmentation,” on the other hand, must “seek out the [inevitable] rifts and fissures of foundational identities and constitutions, . . . not consolidate them; . . . calls up for contest [group] identities; . . . saves spaces of alternative perspectives and forms of life; . . . resists the states’ organization of politics into approved spaces and formats; . . . [and] decenters the state as the owner and licensor of politics.”

Altogether, then, postmodern rationales of democracy, rather than authorizing forms and processes of self-government, authorize attitudes and practices of populist democracy as much outside the state as the liberal corporate state makes necessary.

John Locke, Thomas Jefferson, and J. S. Mill are not so much repudiated as simply set aside. Liberal democracy is not assaulted and overturned in the manner of either Mussolini or Lenin, for example (though some of their critical analyses are accepted), but rather “deconstructed,” its fundamental assumptions and processes challenged and invalidated. There is no quest for a “fuhrer” or for a single, supreme party, conceptions abhorrent to postmodern tendencies toward otherness, differentiation, decentralization, and devolution of power. Instead, there is persistent effort to reaffirm the diversities and multiplicities of ordinary folk around the globe. In fact, though postmodern politi-
cal thinking generally sets aside talk of “human nature,” if that implies that there might be something common or universal about humankind, it nonetheless embodies a potent understanding of the human species. Somewhat in the fashion of Locke’s insistence on the sense-impressions-created diversity of human beings, and of Mill’s idea of “individuality,” and of Dewey’s of an infinitude of “felt needs,” and of Laski’s “inexpungable variety of human wills,” postmodernism (like previous modernisms) rests on parts and eschews or condemns wholes. Indeed, the whole is often understood, not even as the sum of the parts, but often as rather less than the sum. Postmodernism adds, however, a vastly enlarged emphasis on the socialized and “genealogized” human being situated in social groups formed most fundamentally by the experience of marginalization and other oppressions by dominant forces (something like Marxist alienation of workers). Such groups, not the autonomous, rights-possessing individuals of liberal or rational choice theory, are the basic elements of any modern society. The study of humankind, then, must seek to understand the narratives and situations and identities of these groups and their problematic relation to metanarratives (philosophy, cosmology, ideology, scientific method, religion, historicism, etc.) and to “metainstitutions” (especially the modern state). Throughout, the emphasis is on openness, acceptance, awareness of the Other and of infinite, indelible, unpremeditated differentiation—a sort of uncompetitive Darwinism.

Thus, there is no center, no convergence of reason, no universal principle, no history, no scripture, no God, from which to derive an idea of a good or just society applicable anywhere anytime. Mosaic tablets, the New Testament, the Qur’an, the Confucian mandate of heaven, the (secular) heavenly city of the eighteenth-century philosophers, the Declaration of Independence, and, of course, a Hegelian “state as God marching through history” or a Marxist dialectical materialism, all are deconstructed and set aside as dangerous delusions and impositions, varieties of “the will to a system,” cultural imperialism, state hegemony, globalization, and so on. Rather, justice derives from the genealogy, situation, and experience of oppression of the many groups that make up any modern society. Only that narrative and experience, moreover, can define justice (as felt by any group). Though elements of need and intention may be overlapping among groups, the sense of justice remains specific to each group, is only incompletely communicable outside the group, and is resisted persistently by the dominant power because the group claim is always corrosive of its dominion. Hence, the “good society” is one where (oppressed) groups are enabled and encouraged to understand and sustain their particular identities and where the ethos is one of accepting otherness and differentiation—diverse and multicultural. Cross-cultural understanding, cross-group experience, cul-
tural diversity, toleration, openness, and the presencing of otherness become the hallmarks of the good society and the essence of justice.

Within this sense of human nature and its implications for a good or just society, the nature and purpose of government becomes problematic. On the one hand, the exposure of the mechanisms of oppression imposed through the state by the dominant forces in society would seem to require radical change, perhaps total reconception of the role and purpose of a nonetheless active government. On the other, the very idea of government, especially any idea that implies universality of application—for example, Thomas Paine’s claim in *Common Sense* (1776) that “the cause of America is in great measure the cause of all mankind” or the call of *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) that the “workers of the world unite”—is called into question. So notions of government vary from a near anarchism required for genuine openness to the Other and to difference (government is, thus, seen as necessarily an instrument of conformity and dominance) to a potential instrument for the liberation of “affinity groups” from the domination of even a liberal corporate state—though how the power of government might unbind or liberate or presence diversities and othernesses without becoming itself a means and force of oppression and domination remains uncertain. (The approach to the law itself by critical legal studies, e.g., repeatedly illustrates the tension.)

In general, however, postmodern thinking seeks to move democracy away from centralizations of power and toward various ways to foreground, enhance, and empower previously stigmatized or marginalized groups. Provoked and horrified by the hegemonic language and the global intentions and institutions of both sides in the hot and cold wars from 1914 to 1989–1991 (as well as the hegemony of “the end of history” proclaimed in 1989), some postmodern theorists (or antitheorists) have turned away resolutely from all the powers and forms of government. Corporatized democratic regimes and totalitarian and authoritarian ones are seen as similarly, perhaps even equally, flawed—Bush-Cheney-Rumsfeld and Blair-Straw as bad as Saddam and “socialism with Chinese characteristics”?

This turning away from theories and the efficacy of government leaves postmodernism in a curious place in the Third World. Half a century after the general demise of the formal colonial empires and the designation of the Third World as the less developed, the “outsider” in the cold war between the First (free) and the Second (Communist) Worlds, its experience of modernization (or Westernization or economic development) has been problematic at best. Failure, instability, poverty, the persistence of traditional ways, and the presence of various forms of neocolonialism have left many societies and nations exceedingly skeptical of, even deeply hostile to, many of the modernities of the liberal corporate state held
up as models. Making effective use of such staples of democratic polities as open elections, competitive political parties, legislative give-and-take, and freedom of expression has been especially uneven, in a way even highlighting the limitations of those devices in the First World. Socialist liberation movements, modernist in ideology and style, have not generally been more successful. Benedict Anderson and other scholars have pointed out that, in Southeast Asia at least, the very idea of the nation-state, to say nothing of its democratic version, is a Western intrusion that seeks to impose those universalisms—another cultural imperialism. Hence, the postmodern critiques of technological growth, corporate power, commercial ethos, social science engineering, bureaucracy, nationhood, and even democratic processes—all forms of hegemony—often resonate powerfully in Caracas, Tehran, Cairo, Calcutta, Lagos, and other centers struggling with and nearly overwhelmed by the compulsions of second modernity development and progress. Thus, “postmodern themes,” Pauline Rosenau notes, “including anti-Enlightenment views, anti-modern attitudes, a return to fundamentalist indigenous spirituality, anti-science sentiments, and opposition to modern technology,” seem often to be appropriate responses.\(^48\) Even though liberal, democratic, market economy ideas and institutions have by no means become pervasive in the Third World, their ambiguity or failure and their sponsorship and even imposition by dominant Western powers make postmodern analysis seem on target.

The Third World reaction, for example, often sees modernity as having a corrupting, oppressive effect on indigenous cultures and diversities. In Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses* (1989), a fictional fundamentalist religious leader (modeled on Ayatollah Khomeini?) declares the Western (second modernity) understanding of history and development “the creation and possession of the Devil, of the great Shaitan, the greatest of lies—progress, science, rights.”\(^49\) An Indian postmodernist, upset at the cultural imperialism of British colonial rule in India, even questions British-imposed laws against suttee, the Hindu custom of widows ascending the funeral pyres of their late husbands. Such laws, Gayatri Spivak asserts, deny to women a voice of their own that might understand their immolation as a fulfillment of marital fidelity and moral excellence. Without approving it, Spivak calls for the state to be neutral vis-à-vis suttee. Governments must not impose, require, or prevent in ways that judge or condemn difference or otherness or impose universal guidelines from the “hegemonic metanarratives” of dominant powers. In any case, the resolution of the question of suttee must come from within the differentiated culture of the group, not from an outside power, which necessarily lacks authority.\(^50\)

The postmodern impulse in the Third World thus has as its initial message the nourishment of traditional, local mores in a way evocative of Heidegger’s
preference for the “plural, unstable, motile, and unhierarchial” and his repudia-
tion of second modernity’s “teleocratic, technocratic disposition over words,
deeds, and things.” The practical effect is to seek banishment of as much of the col-
onizing influence as possible and to look toward preservation of long-standing
local, decentralized customs, values, and modes of social organization, whatever
those might be. The organizational, intellectual, and technological power of the
second modernity (and its characteristic liberal corporate state), however, is
often sufficiently embedded, and sufficiently attractive to indigenous people, to
prevent its irradication and, thus, often sustains huge and problematic contra-
dictions amid local othernesses. Furthermore, the indigenous cultures them-
selves often possess or generate potent hegemonic metanarratives of their own
with at least as much tendency toward oppression, exclusion, and denial of dif-
ference as those of the colonizing powers. (One is somehow reminded of the
Japanese reaction to Tagore’s effort to uphold Asian spiritual values against
Western technology and materialism: that would simply deny Japan the benefits
of second modernity industry and power and hinder the development of a Japa-
nese nationalistic metanarrative [kokutai] able to survive in the modern world
[see chapter 9].) Thus, postmodernism in the Third World both highlights some
of the weaknesses and dangers of the second modernity outlook and second
modernity institutions, including its rationale for democracy, and the difficulties
present when Third World societies must nevertheless, so it seems, face the
question of organizing and rationalizing government in the twenty-first century
(see chapters 8 and 9).

The effort to bring postmodern guidelines into an understanding of govern-
ment is in a way reminiscent of Locke’s projection of first modernity thinking to
form ideas of self-government. In An Essay concerning Human Under-
sstanding (1690), Locke pointed out that the formation of individual identity by a multi-
tude of sense impressions results in a “variety of pursuits . . . wherein it will be
no wonder to find variety and difference. . . . Though all men’s desires tend to
happiness, yet they are not all moved by the same object. Men may choose differ-
ent things, and yet all choose right.”51 The postmodern analogue is the empha-
sis on differentiation and nonjudgment, though the unit is often the group, not
the individual. If government suppresses these differences and blocks the var-
ious paths that persons choose for their happiness (their freedom), that, accord-
ing to Locke, is tyranny and justifies rebellion, organization, and action to
overthrow the regime. The postmodern analogue is the urge and need for
oppressed groups to crystallize their own identities and to resist the power of the
dominant group. Then Locke posits a “contract” where the freed people form a
government protective of their rights and suited to their convenience—“just
government derived from the consent of the governed.” The postmodern ana-
logue is the repudiation of all the structures and forces of bureaucratic government (Foucault’s “society of normalization”) and the need to reconstitute somehow on new premises that accept the presence of all differentiations (Honig’s “democratic cosmopolitanism”). In the Jeffersonian corollary to Locke, the variety of men’s desires and intentions in the “pursuit of happiness,” and the contrary tendency of powerful states to manage or homogenize them, requires a strong bias toward decentralization and local control. The postmodern analogue is, following Lyotard (and others), a “decentralized plurality of democratic, self-managing groups and institutions whose members problematize the norms of their practice and take responsibility for modifying them as situations require.” Though how this might be worked out in an actual frame and rationale of government may not be precise and comprehensive (suspect anyhow because of affinity for metanarrative), certain corrective directions for modern government are at least pointed out.

There must be, as Young explains, a deliberate presencing of previously oppressed groups, an encouragement and facilitation of their sense of identity, an attention to their narrative and situation, and a privileging of their voice in public affairs to “level their place on the playing field” with the already-entrenched dominant groups. Pressures and movements toward centralization, homogenization, bureaucratization, certification, even any exaltation of the idea of national sovereignty itself, all must be resisted because of their strong tendency to repress the very qualities and circumstances essential for ensuring justice to groups. *The politics of difference and the politics of identity* become the watchwords, rather than a politics of universal principles, or of conflict of interest, or even of individual rights. 52 To again cite Lyotard, “legitimate principles of knowledge . . . [and] disciplines disappear,” and an “immanent, . . . ‘flat’” approach to the political realm emerges. Any idea of the purpose of government itself, when deconstructed, very nearly loses intelligibility, leaving legitimate only such unpremeditated circumstances and procedures as emerge from the accepted presence and interaction of the liberated groups.

The idea of democracy, then, has taken another step further along the path of modernity laid out by Bacon and Locke in the seventeenth century, by Mill and Dewey two centuries later, and then by Fukuzawa and Liang in East Asia. In this fourth conception, the basic “parts” are understood, not as individuals, but as affinity groups oppressed, not just, as traditionally, by tyrants, but also by the very nature of contemporary society and liberal government. Thus, the just or good society is one responsive to the needs and integrity of the oppressed groups rather than to any allegedly universal values or institutions that define right and justice from above or outside. Marxism, Islam, divine right monarchy, the Confucian mandate of heaven, Enlightenment natural law, the UN “Universal Dec-
laration of Human Rights,” and even twentieth-century procedural democracy are all proscribed as being “foundational,” “hegemonic,” “closed.” Thus barred from imposing any universal guidelines or even procedures, and confined to “situational” responses to the senses of justice of oppressed groups, the purpose of government is limited in a way analogous to the laissez-faire dimension of second modernity thinking: governments should do very little because almost anything that they might attempt will simply interfere with the (private, idiosyncratic) needs and fulfillments of the diverse parts of society. At most, governments might remove barriers, level inequities, open paths previously closed, and otherwise facilitate survival and justice as defined by the needs and aspirations of groups. On the other hand, this liberating function might, in the eyes of some groups, require large, enforced interventions in existing circumstances, which very quickly raises scepters of power and hegemony and authority and structure that have been identified in postmodern thinking as the very essence of oppression and tyranny. In any case, the understanding of, and rationale for, democracy achieved in the last third of the twentieth century is a further modernization that both extends and profoundly alters earlier modern-tending efforts to conceive self-government as good government.