

Political Ideologies Context, Ideas, And Practices.
Professor Arvind Sivaramakrishnan
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology Madras
Wk8 Topic 8 Poststructuralism and Postmodernism Lecture 4
Postmodernism Worked Examples 2 and 3; Sokal Revisited 45:33

We'll go on to look at the second paper for us to consider, and that's the Aaron Hanlon - the Aaron Hanlon paper on, I'll just call it up if you'll give me a moment, on the impacts of postmodernism. It's a very forceful title. The paper was written in August 2018, just over a year ago. The title by Aaron Hanlon, that Aaron Hanlon has given it, is 'Post-Modernism Didn't Cause Trump. It Explains Him.'

Well, what does, what is Hanlon's argument? He is an assistant professor of English at a college in the United States, at Colby College, and he recognizes that postmodern theory is a problem. He starts by saying, "It may be the most loathed concept ever to have emerged from academia." Developed in literature and philosophy in the 1970s, in those departments doing those studies, it supposedly according to Hanlon, told us that facts are debatable, that individual perspectives matter most, shared meaning is an illusion, universal truth is a myth.

We're familiar with these themes from our earlier look at Derrida and Foucault. Now, what were the political reactions? The cultural, and I should add the political right, Hanlon just says the right, the right quickly identified these notions of fluidity, indeterminacy and so on as a danger to the very foundation of society, and they spent decades, as Hanlon says, flogging the university lefties who promoted them.

One particular author Roger Kimball accused academic theorists of trying to redefine the traditional humanities as what, I quote, "a species of political grievance mongering." And in that form of grievance mongering, virtue equals whatever sexual, feminist, Marxist, racial or ethnic agenda to which the particular critic has declared his, Bud Kimball says, his allegiance. Another critic, Norman Podhoretz, believed that post modernism was an attack on moral order.

We can probably see why he said that. If any idea of universal morality is no more than a fictitious imposition or no more than a power operation upon all of us, then the very idea of morality collapses and are pointing out the so to speak as postmodernist, if we pointed out the failings in ideas of monolithic or non-contradictory moral schemes and so on, we would presumably, according to Norman Podhoretz, be making an attack on moral order itself. Victor Davis Hanson even faulted postmodernism for the way President Barack Obama handled

healthcare legislation. He said, I quote, “in the gospel of postmodern relativism, what did it matter if the President of the United States promised that Obamacare would not alter existing healthcare plans when it was clear that it would?”.

Well, later, others joined, joined the crusade if that’s the right word, vilifying postmodernism. Centrists and liberals joined in. They searched for a culprit behind the ascent of Donald Trump, as Hanlon says. Michiko Kakutani, a noted author - wrote a book called *The Death of Truth* - blames relativism, and says it was caused by academics promoting the gospel of postmodernism. I quote that, academics promoting the gospel of postmodernism. Daniel Dennett, a very famous logician said in an interview in 2017, again I quote, ‘I think the, what the postmodernists did was truly evil’. Well, Vox, a sort of complementary media outlet, claimed that it wasn’t the first time Trump’s legal team had played postmodernist.

And, I quote, ‘currently, Trump’s legal team hinted that it might be too hard to discern the truth, because It is all relative anyway’; they may have been referring to Trump’s, was it press secretary - was it Kellyanne Conway? - who used the term ‘alternative facts’. Now, we might say that is a thoroughly postmodern concept, alternative facts. And so the claim was made that Trump’s legal team, perhaps Trump’s entire White House team, were playing postmodernist.

No, it’s not true, we don’t think it’s true, we think it’s something else. But the point here, Hanlon is quite right, these challenges to postmodern theory across the board identified something important. And what was it that we, what was the crisis that we faced? According to Hanlon, we were in the process of losing, perhaps had already lost, a shared vocabulary for the world’s problems - that is, the ways we engage with relate to one another current events, and losing this shared vocabulary, he locates this in the United States, says may be the greatest threat to American society. What does it mean? He says, what did it mean that the pro-life movement, that is the anti-abortion movement, could fashion itself, that is his own term, as an avatar of women’s empowerment? I quote, “an avatar of women’s empowerment.” What did it mean that a white woman like Rachel Dolezal, if I hope I pronounced it right, could simply declare that she was black?

So the point is that, as Hanlon says, these were precisely the kinds of things that worried postmodern theorists. Perhaps we’ve got them wrong all along. Hanlon says their project was an attempt to understand why, why it was that people had begun to interpret material facts in such extraordinarily different ways.

Well, Hanlon reminds us that the term postmodern - these days modern sense or current sense - is inherited from, from the work of Lyotard, and Lyotard observed that society was becoming a consumer society, a major society, a post-industrial society. These are not new themes - Adorno and Horkheimer, the great Marx scholars, were very nervous of the rise of consumer society. Herbert Marcuse, another member of the Frankfurt School, started to show the connections between consumer society and media society- a post-industrial society where the attacks on trade unions around the industrial world or most of the industrial world in the, from the late, mid-late 70s onwards, the change in patterns of work to casualise large areas of the former industrial workforce or put them out of work, simple as that, have all been noted. Leo Tao may not have been that far from the apparently thoroughly rational, Marxist or other critics or other left-wing critics, as we might think they are. Frederic Jameson in fact points this out - that Leo Tao saw these large scale shifts, as Hanlon says, game changers, significant developments for art and science and the broader question of how we know what we know.

Well Hanlon says this was a diagnosis, not a political outcome that Lyotard and the others wanted to bring about or agitated to bring about. But, subsequently, post modernism has come to describe a range of theories about language and about knowledge in the world, and so on. Hanlon says Jacques Derrida's concept of deconstruction sought to understand language as a system capable of constantly hiding and deferring meaning rather than a simple conduit for conveying it.

Well, I've said in my critiques of postmodernism, poststructuralism earlier, I've said them in the previous lectures, said in previous lectures, that who's ever said that language is automatically transparent? Nobody has ever said that. When did we actually say it was a simple conduit for conveying meaning, that maybe an implication in Saussure, but we have also noted that much of Derrida's work is a sustained dialogue with Saussure.

But Hanlon goes on to talk about Baudrillard and the concept of the simulacrum, which we have already mentioned, we have already touched upon, and that is a copy without an original, which leads to a hyper, to the hyperreal, a collections of signs, a collection of signs or images, which purports to represent something that actually exists, photographs of wartime combat, ultimately though they portray a wild distortion not drawn from reality.

Well, yes, Hanlon is trying to argue that the post modernists had identified something significant about our time and that they were in a sense diagnosing our condition. They were changing our understanding of language, truth and knowledge. Well, Marx did say, we've noted this, philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world, in various ways. The point is to change it.

But - it's been said that philosophers of postmodernity have inverted the point, right, and have sought mainly to interpret the world rather than change it. That's one of the accusations against them. It's been made very widely. Allan Bloom, a noted literary theorist and culture critic in the United States, noted for a conservative attitude, wrote a book in the 1980s, I think published in 1987, called *The Closing of the American Mind* it's a very fine work.

If it's of any help, it was acclaimed, if I'm not mistaken - read it when it came out - if I'm not mistaken, it was treated very seriously and taken very, had a very high reputation among people right across the political spectrum in the humanities. But Allan Bloom challenged postmodern theorists, not necessarily for their diagnosis of the postmodern condition, but for accepting that the postmodern condition as they saw it is inevitable.

Bloom understood that post modernism didn't simply emerge from what Hanlon caused the pet theories of wayward English professors. Instead, Bloom saw it as a cultural moment, brought on by force as greater than the university; it didn't just, postmodernism didn't just happen because a few professors wrote a few things about it, a few papers about it. There were wider forces at work and it could well be that postmodernism represented some of those and attempted to diagnose some of those.

Of course, within academia, within the university, within the academy, Bloom was particularly worried about students who pursued commercial interests above truth or wisdom, he was troubled by what he called, you know, he saw as the insidious influence of pop music, he lamented parental loss of self-control over children's moral education, and so on. He called the rock music industry perfect capitalism supplying to demand and helping to create it; these are all quotations from Allan Bloom, which Hanlon gives us. And rock music, the rock music industry, according to Bloom was perfect capitalism with all the moral dignity of drug traffic, powerful phrases written by a very accomplished scholar who could also write very clearly and very forcefully.

But since then, those who like Bloom have been on the cultural and perhaps political right have, according to Hanlon, contorted, crassly contorted Bloom's forceful arguments. Bloom can at

least be disagreed with And according to Hanlon, Bloom's followers on the right or Bloom's successors on the right have crassly contorted Bloom's arguments and instead have said that postmodernism was made not by consumerism and other large-scale technological developments around the world, instead it was created by dangerous lefty academics.

Kimball called them tenured radicals - that's the title of his book, a book against the academic left. And this treats postmodernism, this approach treats postmodernism as a form of leftwing politics, with its own set of tenets and principles of course, rather than a broader cultural moment that left-wing academics diagnosed and identified.

Well, Hanlon concludes that today, critics on both left and right are happy to wave their fingers at postmodern theory, so long as they can blame it for the Trump electorate's apparently unprecedented disregard for the truth. In one journal, an online magazine which is apparently obsessed with the, according to Hanlon, obsessed with the evils of critical theory in postmodernism, somebody called Matt McManus reflects on the emergence and rise of postmodern conservatism. I don't know what sense that makes, and a right-wing scholar, David Ernst, contends that, I quote, "Trump is the first president to turn postmodernism against itself." From the left there's another critique - relativism, this is Kakutani again, Michiko Kakutani, writing in the *Guardian* - relativism has been ascendant since the culture that began in the 1960s.

Back then, it was embraced by the new left, this is a quotation from Kakutani. Since back then, back in the 1960s, relativism was embraced by the new left, who were actually eager to expose the biases of western bourgeois male-dominated thinking, and by academics promoting the gospel of postmodernism, which argued against - that there are no universal truths, only smaller personal truths.

And these were therefore "perceptions shaped by the cultural and social forces of one's day". Since then, of course, according to Kakutani, relativistic arguments have been hijacked by the populist right. Well, these arguments have been put elsewhere, as Hanlon notes, or similar arguments have been put elsewhere, and interestingly, some of them contend that even if right-wing politicians and other deniers of science were not reading Derrida and Foucault, according to Lee McIntyre, for one, the germ of the idea, that is postmodernism, made its way to them.

The writers therefore, as Hanlon says, invoke postmodernism to describe not a contested set of observations about the state of knowledge and culture, but instead they seem to regard

postmodernism as a committed belief system that forms the basis of partisan politics. In Michiko Kakutani's words, the gospel of postmodernism suggests that there is just such a system, some kind of political gospel that has reached the far right, or that the far right have grasped and exploited.

But this is misleading in two ways. One, it treats Lyotard and his fellows, his followers, as proponents, as expanding a world where objective truth loses all value. It does not treat them as analysts who wanted to explain why this had already happened. Secondly, as soon as postmodernism became a fashionable topic in humanities and social sciences, it became a subject of extensive debate. It is highly contested and hotly contested. And there we are, I mean, I participate in my own small way in that contest. I'm certainly not the only one, there are hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions around the world who continue to recognize significant challenges in postmodernism and poststructuralism, but to take issue with them where, we would argue, we need to take issue with them. That's exactly what I have tried to do here.

So, Hanlon, Hanlon moves on. If we are going to claim that Trump, Trump is a man of alt-right relativism, or the triumphs of the populist far right are consequences of the academic left's supposition about what was happening, then we must show it, we must demonstrate the connection. But the difficulty is that, as Hanlon says, commentators trying to trace these connections really are far too casual about causality. They could easily be postmodernists themselves, as Hanlon himself says.

Well, yes, it is true that the populous right uses relativistic arguments. Identity politics is bad when people of colour, people who aren't white, I am using the American phrase there, people of colour, which Hanlon uses, identity politics is bad when people who are not white use it or embrace it. But identitarianism, that is white nationalist identity politics is good and necessary for white survival. Well, yes, isn't that a postmodernist kind of argument, right?

But that doesn't mean it happens because of postmodernism. And McIntyre goes further and notes that figures like intelligent design theorists, Philip Johnson for example, conspiracy theorists like Mike Cernovich cite the influence of postmodern theory on their projects, but once again, even they, even Lee McIntyre, recognizes, acknowledges, documents, rightwing think tanks and corporate-backed firms, corporate fronts, like tobacco industry, I quote, I'm quoting here, 'research' in inverted commas, these had established, already established, alternative facts programmes for the right long before creative-misinformation entrepreneurs came round.

Now we must not forget that, that major corporate bodies which face scandals say over the addictive and deadly nature of tobacco or perhaps alcohol as well, certainly fossil fuel corporations, are into the PR industry in a very big way and they've got billions to pour into it. If they don'tt actually deny the harm, they certainly seek to represent it in ways that could and probably do seriously mislead us as to the harm.

Well, Hanlon goes on. Certainly, postmodern theory is difficult, partly because of the ways philosophical jargon is translated. Yes, many of the great postmodernists have written in French, and there would be significant issues of translation. But it's also because much of the writing is as we've as I've already said in the lectures, abstruse, difficult and occasionally, unclarifiable, that is Hanlon's own phrase, an undergraduate - which Cernovich was when he wrote his critique, or a lay person, would almost inevitably come up with, come away with misreadings.

Well, we're all going to struggle with difficult texts. *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason* - it may be one of the great works, greatest works ever written, but whoever said that there was a single way to read it, or that it meant a single thing, we would have to argue for our readings, and it is here that Hanlon says, well, current trends long predate postmodern theory. Kakutani herself opens her essay in the *Guardian* by quoting Hannah Arendt, 1951, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. I quote, "The ideal subject of totalitarian rule is not the convinced Nazi or the convinced communist, but people for whom the distinction between fact and fiction - three dots there showing it is an extended quotation and the distinction between true and false, I paraphrase that - and according to Arendt, in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, which is recommended in this course as well, the ideal subject of totalitarian rule is not the convinced Nazi or the convinced communist, it is someone for whom, people for whom, the distinction between fact and fiction and between true and false, have both collapsed. Arendt herself thought political dissimulation, political lying, deception, and so on manipulation, were much older. Of course, they were much older, she knew that, so does everyone else.

The deliberate falsehood, Arendt herself says in 1971 in an essay called 'Lying in Politics', the deliberate falsehood and the outright lie used as a legitimate means to achieve political ends, have been with us since the beginning of recorded history. But, as Hanlon says, we can't say that academic meditations on postmodernity have had no influence on culture at all, but it's just the actual evidence is scarce.

Well, he does recognize that - you know, he says Frederic Jameson's reflections on conspiracy theory are not what convince people that climate change is a hoax or that the Democrat Party has been running a paedophile ring out of a Washington pizza parlour. It's, if you like, Facebook propaganda or Twitter propaganda that's doing that, highly organized propaganda by people who - by climate change deniers, as we've seen, that's hugely funded. And of course, we don't have to look very far to find all manner of conspiracy theories on the net.

Similarly, the Trump investigation claim, made by Trump himself. that the Trump-Russia investigation is a made up story and a Democrat excuse for losing the election. Well, that's not a postmodernist critique of the evidence the Mueller investigation has gathered. That's not postmodernist, it's political chicanery, and Hanlon says so.

The problem then, is that if we are so eager to blame postmodernism for Trump-era politics, we fail to see the explanatory value of postmodernism. For example, Baudrillard's book *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*, becomes the denial of an objective truth so obvious as 'the Gulf War happened', but Baudrillard is trying to tell us something about the way we've symbolized and represented the Gulf War, right? So it's not just the denial of an objective truth. The point is that our impressions have been warped, this is Hanlon's own term, by media framing and agitprop - to us a very old-fashioned political term; the real enemy of truth, as Hanlon says, is not postmodernism, but propaganda, the active distortion of truth for political purposes. Trumpism practices this form of distortion, as he says, on a daily basis.

We're familiar with that in all political life today, we're not at all surprised by it, the point for us is to be alert to it. And Hanlon includes the postmodernist theorists whom we vilify didn't cause it, but they have given us a way of understanding how, precisely how, as Hanlon says, falsehood can masquerade as truth.

So that's a very thoughtful, very incisive analysis of how to understand postmodernism - not as the origin of a vicious, evil, mendacious politics, but as a way of understanding how we've got where we are, if that is where we are. It is philosophy in a much older tradition. It's a very incisive analysis by Hanlon.

Well, we've got something to move on to which is this, the impact of - well our third item in this seminar discussion is or seminar type discussion is an analysis, a paper by a review by Michael Bérubé of a book by Alan Sokal on the hoax that he played on the journal *Social Text* in 1996.

The book is called *Beyond The Hoax* - the subtitle is *Science, Philosophy and Culture* - by Alan Sokal, published in 2008 by Oxford University Press. And Bérubé gives us the background in 1966 [correction - 1996] , as you know, Alan Sokal played this elaborate trick, in particular on the editors of a broadly leftist journal called *Social Text*. He submitted an essay filled with six kinds of non-sense, or at least six. The editors either didn't see that or were willing to countenance the non-sense and published the essay.

In response, a great many scholars in the humanities and social sciences lashed out, as Bérubé says, in ways that often made them look even worse than the editors. And on the other side of the argument, Sokal found himself hailed, that's the actual word here, by legions of fans and supporters who credited him with finally exposing the vacuity of cultural studies, literary theory, postmodernism, obscurantist jargon, science studies, people who write about disciplines that they don't know much about, and all the above.

Well, after that since then as Bérubé says, he's met a number of colleagues who spit and curse at the very sound of Sokal's name, and a much larger number of people who credit Sokal with proving, apparently once and for all, that everything humanists have done since 1970 has been bunk.

Well, since then, Sokal - Sokal is a perfectly serious physicist, he's teamed up with Jean Bricmont and severely criticized epistemological relativism, that is, the idea that knowledge is relative, in the philosophy of science, a perfectly serious area of philosophy itself. Sokal and Bricmont note that major figures in science studies or philosophy of science if you like, sometimes say things like 'the validity of theoretical propositions in the sciences is in no way affected by factual evidence'. That's one.

Secondly, there is no sense - another quotation - there is no sense attached to the idea that some standards or beliefs are rationally, really rational as distinct from merely being locally accepted as such. Well, does this indicate the existence of a, as Sokal himself says, a radically relativist academic Zeitgeist, Zeitgeist being the spirit of the time, it's a German word.

Well, Bérubé is careful. Yes, it is weird to think, it would be weird if we were living in a radically relativistic Zeitgeist. But we must remember that standards of weirdness tend to vary from discipline to discipline - that's hardly surprising. Sokal seems never to have been comfortable dealing with people who, so to speak, hypothesize imaginary gardens with real toads in them, or meditate on, as Bérubé says, cold pastorals that tease us out of thought.

But Sokal is no longer engaged in literary theory, and he's gone into the philosophy of science - as Bérubé says, into realms where the distinction between justified and unjustified belief actually matters to the world, specifically the history and philosophy of science. And this seems apparently to be conducted sometimes by people who're, as Bérubé says, rigorously indifferent to the question of whether a scientific theory is actually true.

And Sokal has gone also into the philosophy of religion. Well, it's a bit of a generalization to say that religion is practised by people who are rigorously indifferent to the claim that belief should be rationally justified, that is a little bit hasty, I'd say it's a bit hasty. But Sokal apparently spends his first hundred pages or so in *Beyond the Hoax* talking about the hoax itself and providing a context like a recap.

He, he does say he is proud of his *Social Text* article. And the reviewer, Bérubé, is quite critical, saying he repeats himself too much in this collection of essays. Sokal himself says that his defence of scientific realism, the idea that science speaks the truth and the bald truth or whatever, is modest, Sokal says his defence of scientific realism is modest. And according to Bérubé, this is a virtue, it makes the Sokal defence of scientific realism cogent and convincing, that's the actual phrase Bérubé uses.

Sokal recognizes that science is a human endeavour. Like any other human endeavour, it merits being subjected to rigorous social analysis - not so problematic. He has good things to say about Thomas Kuhn's book *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, which Sokal apparently calls moderate arguments. But the distinction, according to Sokal, is the difference between the contexts of discovery and the context of justification.

Sokal recognizes that any number of factors, you know, scientific and non-scientific, can contribute to the discovery of natural laws, nothing surprising about that, nothing unusual. People have discovered a lot of natural laws by accident, was it penicillin was discovered, say, when Fleming returned to his lab having forgotten a petri dish and found that a particular fungus had an effect on the culture in the petri dish, and we have good reason to be grateful for the fact that he noticed it and didn't simply wash the petri dish out, if it was a petri dish, that is

Context of discovery, certainly - very few scientists have actually denied that. It can range from the details of lab life to the ways research funding is done, which is often well. The term used here is vicissitudes. Yes, some people get funded, some do not, there's not always an obvious reason for it and so on. Newton himself, as we have noted, I think, earlier, spent a lot of his time

in the study of alchemy and the divine. Einstein was reluctant to believe in an expanding universe, but those are the contexts of discovery.

The context of justification is quite a different thing. And according to Bérubé, apparently quoting Sokal as well, the existence of X-rays or the precession of Mercury's perihelion cannot and does not depend on factors extraneous to, outside the scientific evidence, which help us to reach a conclusion. In other words, yah, it's, it makes good sense to be a historical relativist in respect to the context of discovery. Newton himself believed in God.

And even Sokal, who regards this as delusional, acknowledges that he knows perfectly well that people at different times in different places have different means of coming to conclusions about how the universe works. And we might even have different beliefs about that, different ways of thinking about in reaching conclusions in one particular period, let alone many.

But, according to Sokal, properly scientific belief, and this seems to be according to Bérubé as well, is distinguished by its insistence, almost a metabelief as Bérubé says, that justified true beliefs can be validated only by rigorous rational inquiry. So, Bérubé continues with his review of Sokal, a review of Sokal, and Sokal apparently pauses repeatedly to ask why so many people in the postmodern, in inverted commas, "postmodern" humanities and social sciences, have been so hostile to the idea that the context of justification might in fact, involve epistemological realism of some kind.

Sokal sees it as a sociological question. And Bérubé continues on those lines. But he reminds us of the ways in which our readings of even the terms like science, particularly western science, may conjure up certain images in our minds. He says when, Bérubé says, when some people think of **[(())(36:09)]** the term western science, they think of Hiroshima and Agent Orange and the Union Carbide plant in Bhopal and not say, of the discovery of neutrino oscillation.

So we, apparently we moved from, some of us then moved from skepticism about the benefits of western science to the conclusion that the Enlightenment was no more than a stalking horse for imperialism. Foucault seems to move to a conclusion that the search for knowledge is just a search for power. And as you've seen, I've severely criticised that with reasons.

Well, why should postmodern intellectuals, champion local knowledges and the heterogeneity of language games. Well, there may be arguments about what Wittgenstein meant by language

games, but we'll take the phrase at face value for now, the heterogeneity of language games. Why should we champion those against the universalist aspirations of the Enlightenment? Well Bérubé says that, well, academic leftists in the humanities who do that are themselves thinking of warm and fuzzy feelings; as he himself says that, I quote, we lefties have about the local, from our local independent bookstore - yes, I'm on the committee of one, the local independent, a cooperative bookstore in my hometown of Southampton - to our local independent food co-op, yes, I used to shop at one of those and there are plenty of them around today as well, all over the world.

Yes, there are good things about the local, but the risk of not being sufficiently alert or critical about them means that we forget that many of our local knowledges are parochial, reactionary and/or theocratic, or worse, I add. And - Bérubé rightly points out that defending variety or heterogeneity as equal to that of language-games has proceeded as if it's the moral equivalent of a defence of species diversity. It's not, it leads us into moral relativism. It could make us unable to decide whether genocide or a, is a good or a bad thing. Are the language-games of charlatans or fascists to be preserved against the language games of the indigenous people of the Americas? That is Bérubé's example.

And Bérubé draws upon an example here, the biologist Meera Nanda. In 2004, she wrote a book called *Prophets Facing Backwards* or *Prophets Facing Backward*, I beg your pardon. And this showed that opportunistic far right Hindu nationalists have, I quote again, appealed precisely to postmodern and post-colonial critiques of Enlightenment universalism, in order to promote, apparently, Vedic science and what Bérubé calls a reactionary political agenda. Sokal follows Nanda's argument, apparently to good effect.

But Sokal himself seems to go on to think that arguing against relativism in the sciences requires a parallel argument against postmodern pragmatism in human affairs. And, well, at that point, it could well be that Sokal is, how should I put it, writing in areas that he is not that familiar with. For example, pragmatism can be post-realism, but realism itself is not exactly an innocent term.

And in international affairs, in other theories in the social sciences, international relations and other theories in social sciences, realism carries a connotation of deep conservatism and an unquestioning acceptance of the existing order and its power-relations. So, well, the point is that Sokal may not be fully alert to the kinds of implications of methods he's espousing. But Sokal

himself, as Bérubé notes, contends that fundamentalism and not abstruse literary theory is the most important current challenge science and reason face.

Now that is a much stronger claim, and one that could certainly be argued for. In fact, we shall soon move on to theocracy and fundamentalism as our next topic. Well, where does Bérubé end up? He says, yes, Sokal has undertaken a necessary task, that is, struggling against religious fundamentalism, but he then may want to reconsider the value of pragmatism in human affairs, that is, of learning to compromise, get on with each other, rub shoulders, keeping disagreements at arm's length, or learning how to talk about them - in other words, engage in civilised political life, which may inherit strong elements of liberalism, it could inherit strong elements of conservatism, it could also as we shall see, inherit strong elements in republicanism, which we come to later on in this course.

But according to Bérubé, then we can move decisively beyond the hoax. Sokal has certainly recognised that the kinds of issues he raised in his original hoax, open up and lead him, lead himself, into much more significant issues in the philosophy of science and the philosophy of the social sciences and into what is actually involved in postmodern theorizing about literature. So that concludes our analysis of poststructuralism and postmodernism, and we shall move on to another topic next time.

Poststructuralism and postmodernism in our NPTEL Ideologies Course for 2019-20. Now the reason we're not quite done is that I realised I had not included a response by Sokal to Michael Bérubé, who had reviewed a more recent book of his. So, Sokal quite reasonably points out that there are certain areas in Bérubé's review at the end, towards the end of it, and he makes a response to it.

All I'll do here is note the response and very briefly summarize it from an excerpt below the published, the online version, of Bérubé's review, and Sokal links to a much more detailed reply and you can look that up.

Right. First of all, Sokal says, as he himself says, professor Bérubé's review of my book is illuminating, and in general, very fair. It certainly reads very well, it reads like a strong, careful analysis of the book. But Sokal then says, my only complaint is with his, that is Bérubé's attribution to me, to Sokal, in the last six paragraphs of his review, that is of views about the philosophic foundations of ethics and - Sokal says - philosophical foundations of ethics that are nowhere asserted or implied in my book, and that I do not in fact hold.

So, Sokal, remember, we're not reading, the Bérubé review is not just about the Sokal hoax, it's a review of a later book by Sokal - and Sokal reasonably quite reasonably takes issue with the last six paragraphs or so of the review, where he says Bérubé attributes views to him which he does not hold about the philosophical foundations of ethics.

Sokal provides a link and of course, if you wish to look this up, yes, I've provided the link to Bérubé's view and Sokal's reply is the first one below it. So you would be free to look that up. I could perhaps amend my PowerPoint which will go out to you to give the link to Sokal's review, I'll do that anyway.

So that is just a short correction to my account of Bérubé's review of Sokal from our previous and I thought concluding lecture on poststructuralism and postmodernism, but we must, of course, take account of Sokal's review, er, reply to Bérubé. And that does in fact conclude the topic of poststructuralism and postmodernism for us.