

A Book Endorsement

by Tibor R. Machan

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This is not a book review but a flat-out endorsement. Stephen R. C. Hicks's [*Explaining Postmodernism*](#) is a great but very scary read.

Professor Hicks has written a sweeping yet very readable explanation of why contemporary intellectuals embrace postmodernism. This is the position widely championed in academic circles—from philosophy, literature, law and the social sciences—that holds that there is no truth, no reality, no clear meaning, no understanding and, most of all, no value in relying on human reason for any purpose whatsoever.

Most folks around the country probably hear of this movement only rarely and indirectly. They hear about multiculturalism, the view that no culture is better than any other, all viewpoints no matter where they originate are worthy of respect. They learn about it by brushing up against political correctness, which is a paradoxical aspect of postmodernism since it assumes that saying and doing certain things is wrong and ought to be avoided. But, of course, postmodernism holds that nothing can be shown to be right or wrong. So how could anything be shown to be politically correct or incorrect?

Well, just so—nothing can be so shown but those who hold political power can still insist and force the rest of us to obey. Not because they can reasonably claim that their edicts are correct, true or right but because they prefer them. Yes, that's all there is to postmodernist views on how we should act—namely, the preferences of those who get away with running the show.

Professor Hicks' wonderful account of how we ended in this fix—whereby nothing is deemed to be true or right or good but all we have is what influential people impose on the rest of us—is a tour de force of clear historical research. The most important figures in Western intellectual history show up, for better and for worse—mostly for

worse—and among them the greatest villain is Immanuel Kant, the 18th Century German philosopher who brought about what has been called a Copernican Revolution. The substance of this revolution is that it is not reality that gives us the contents of our minds but our minds—or some great Mind (if you listen to Hegel)—that produce reality.

Yes, you read it right—the postmodernists do not think there is a real world for us to know. Instead everything is really invented, by everyone's—or some obscure being's—subjective mind. So there is no right way to interpret a novel, poem or even a scientific theory. It all depends on who is doing the "interpreting"—which is to say, who is injecting his or her creative ideas into the stream of ideas of a society. There is no reality out there, however, to show whether these ideas are good or bad, sound or unsound. And if one protests that this is nonsense, postmodernists will quickly retort that one is deluded to think that ideas must be logical, reasonable. No, that's just a prejudice.

That is what major thinkers believe these days, all around the Western world. Stanford, Harvard, Oxford, Cambridge, Princeton—you name the prestigious institution of your choice and the major figures in it, the books their presses like to publish, advocate this stuff with inordinate confidence built on absolutely nothing but thin air.

Professor Hicks' book was published in Tempe, AZ, by an outfit called Scholargy Publishers, not by one of the "important" publishing houses. From the web site of the outfit it looks like authors need to pay to get their work published there. This is sad but not at all surprising, considering the monumental expose Professor Hicks manages to bring off in his work. Who would publish a book within the mainstream publishing community that shows beyond any reasonable doubt that mainstream publishing is largely complicit in perpetrating the greatest absurdity in intellectual circles when it keeps rolling out the works of such prominent figures as Richard Rorty, Jacques Derrida, Michael Foucault, Stanley Fish and others, all of whom are enamored by the likes of Hegel, Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, Jean Paul Sartre and other absurdists.

One of Professor Hicks' most astute contributions is to explain why most of these absurdists are politically supportive of the Left—of socialism—even after the undeniably evident practical and theoretical demise of that political economic system. The story is brilliantly told

and I leave it to you to check it out. This read is eminently worth it and not beyond anyone's attentive reach.

(For more, check at <http://www.stephenhicks.org/>.)