

capitalism. Ironically, such postmodern philosophies end up joining forces with ultraconservatives who advocate inaction in the face of misery.

Fourth, the value relativism inherent in postmodern critiques enables despotism and oppression. Most postmodern theorists argue that all value hierarchies are hypocritical—they are merely examples of choice posing as truth. This cynical relativism leads to the conclusion that the Rwandan genocide is really no worse than the imagined violence of free enterprise capitalism. Postmodern theorists Martin Heidegger and Paul De Man defended Hitler's final solution during the Nazi era. Michel Foucault chose to become an enthusiastic advocate of Iran's turn toward Islamic radicalism. In the ideal world of the postmodern theorist, democratic capitalism would be replaced by a Marxist utopia. We have a few examples of efforts to construct Marxist utopias: the Soviet Union, China, Cuba, and the various Eastern European dictatorships. All such efforts have not just failed—they have been remarkable failures.

A final problem with the postmodern critique is the use of nearly incomprehensible jargon. I have taught graduate courses in rhetorical theory where I have assigned students to read the key works of Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Jean Baudrillard, and other postmodern theorists. Even for students with an outstanding background in classical and modern rhetorical theory, it is almost impossible to meaningfully interpret postmodern texts. Yet critique arguments routinely invite high school students to make sense of arguments that confuse many Ph.D. candidates in philosophy.

Perhaps the most remarkable demonstration of the difficulty of understanding postmodern thought is the publication in the Spring/Summer 1996 edition of *Social Text* of an article by Alan Sokal, professor of physics at New York University. Professor Sokal became convinced that postmodern theorists were engaged in an academic fraud: using incomprehensible language designed to confuse others into thinking that it is profound. Sokal tested this theory by constructing a jibberish-filled article for submission to a leading peer-reviewed postmodern journal, *Social Text*. His article was titled "Transcending the Boundaries: Towards a Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity." Consider the following sentence from his article: "I suggest that pi (π) isn't constant and universal, but relative to the position of an observer, and is, therefore, subject to ineluctable historicity." The language of the article was intentionally incomprehensible, yet it was selected for publication.

Immediately after publication, Sokal revealed the hoax. He tried to convince the editors of *Social Text* to publish his reaction to their decision to publish his article, but they declined to further embarrass themselves.

Alan Sokal and Jean Bricmont, a professor at the University Catholique de Louvain in France, wrote a 1998 book titled *Fashionable Nonsense: Postmodern Intellectuals'*