

Modern Postmodernity and Discursive Power: Part II

ALGIS MICKŪNAS

Department of Philosophy and Cultural Studies, Vilnius Gediminas Technical University, 1 Trakų Street, 01132 Vilnius
Email: amuali@gmail.com

The discussion follows the logic of Western modern metaphysics (mathematical) and ontology (atomistic materialism) in order to demonstrate how scientific discourses assumed a power to construct the environment. A discourse of any discipline is constructed on the basis of its value to be applied on the material, homogeneous environment, to yield desired technical products, including genetic, chemical, electronic, physiological, etc. Thus, each discourse contains the 'power' to remake the environment in accordance with its rules. The result is the following: environment is a discursive construct. Such constructivism is accepted by post-modern writers who claim that all discourses are a power which determines how we understand and treat the environment.

Keywords: power, progress, value, needs, discourse, conditions

INTRODUCTION

The problematic of power has been discussed from ancient Far East all the way to modern political thought and even postmodern semiotics. The last has admitted that power is not to be located anywhere, although its exercise is everywhere through discourses. Such an admission is well taken, but without a proper grounding in awareness. The task at hand is to indicate what grounds power in awareness and why it cannot be located. To recall the previous discussion and its basic composition: the lived world of morphologically constituted and intuitively accessible events and objects is bracketed under scientific skepsis; the posited transcendent and homogeneous reality is inaccessible to perception. The construction of the theoretical-methodological formal discourses have no intuitive counterpart, i.e. no vertical hold. They can be articulated horizontally in a serial progression in accordance with their own intrinsic rules. The homogeneous transcendent reality is contingent and hence open to *possibility* (Mickunas 2014). As a result, there is no necessary connection between the scientific formal discourses, or their signitive functions, and the transcendent reality. The connection is arbitrary. This is to say, it requires a specific intentionality which is not necessitated by any real compulsion or law to connect the formal signitive discourses to the posited reality. The arbitrariness appears under various guises: the 'application' of theory to 'praxis', the most lyrically stressed intoxication that the purpose of all science is its reshaping of the environment in accordance with human designs, the humanistic efforts to 'humanise' nature and the 'human animal', the aims

at improving nature, and the exclamations that something is good because we say it is good in accordance with our own desires and even our cultural habits etc.

POWER

In principle, the intentional connection between the formal discourses and the posited reality has no hold in anything, and it needs not respect any prescription and qualitative composition of the lived world. And yet it is a required nexus between the discursive and the real. After all, the signitive formal discourses do not point to anything that would be intuitively similar to them. In this sense, the arbitrary selection of formal components for possible correlation to the homogeneous quantified world offers no other option apart from the imposition of the formally constructed methods on the real. While this might seem obvious, there appears an unnoticed requirement for this correlation: concrete activity. The latter is directed by projected choices of what is materially possible, i.e. what can be made (Murphy et al. 1986). The formal discourses, not having any similarity to anything intuitively present to perception, cannot be correlated to anything perceptual; if the perceptual awareness is excluded, then the correlation requires an active intervention and construction of the posited homogeneous world in accordance with the formal requirements. Since the latter are constructs, they are also invented for the sake of the reconstruction of the material reality in accordance with our chosen projects. All this seems to rest on nothing. Indeed, Fink has argued very cogently that modernity emerges as if out of nothing (Fink 1974). In this sense, the formal requirements comprise *possibilising* arrangements which lead the construction of the real or the real in accordance with formal discourses. This is to say that the 'intention' to control the environment under whatever guise is not a power aim of Bacon, Descartes, Galileo, Buffon, the capitalists or the Marxists, but the constitution of the possibility of arbitrariness with respect to the connection between theory and 'reality', an arbitrariness of the priority of will over reason and nature.

This priority is expressed in many ways, but what is relevant for the conjunction of modern Western thought to postmodern claims is the composition of modern will. It is not identical to the traditional (sometimes still accepted) conception of a choice between various options. Rather it assumes a position between the constructed scientific discourses and the homogeneous material world such that it selects which discourses can be applied to construct the environment. But to do so, will becomes a place of valuation. Here we encounter a radical shift from the priority of the question of Being to that of value as an explicit or implicit ground of postmodern theses. It can be claimed that the essence of the life world of modern thought is a process of valuation. Everything in the universe assumes a value to the extent that it serves our interests. Contrary to claims that the world has no value, the world constructed by modern thought is full of values: labour theory of values for sale, values produced and to be produced, values of stocks and bonds, values of education, family values, religious values, ideologically constructed values, the changing and the new values, the value of life and even calculated death, social values, and persons are judged as to their value in all of these settings. Indeed, the basic mode of awareness is valuative selectivity. It should be also clear that awareness and perception are no longer given in some pure empirical sense, but are selected on the grounds of valuation. In this sense, what is given as a plethora of empirical environment, is, for the most part, ignored. What is perceived depends on its specific value. Indeed, there are social mechanisms that not only consist of values, but also the evaluation of values that selects specific ones deemed relevant in terms of future value projects. It has been argued that all these values are human and hence the primacy is placed on modern subject as

the source of values. This claim would hold if the human were a distinct and decisive category wherein all other categories and processes were subservient to humans. But this is no longer the case, since other values, such as technologies of various sorts, from electronic media to genetic biochemistry compel the understanding of the human to be equivalent to the rest of the values. This means that genetic biochemistry will not treat the human as a special category, but will have to reduce all human functions to biochemistry. Thus, the environment, that is constructed on the basis of the process of valuation and is deemed to be objective, requires that the human be treated equally objectively in terms of what such an environment demands, i.e. interpretation of the human as material, chemical, biological and physical entity in order that such constructed technical values could be applied and thus be useful and valuable.

While the process of valuation of events in favour of human 'needs' was briefly indicated, i.e. various reductionisms of the human to biochemistry, genetics and mechanics, the lived awareness subtending this process is a will which intends a unique objectivity which is purely modern. One level of this objectivity is designed to be accessible to quantification and hence it has to be measurable: homogeneous matter. This design, of course, is meant by a specific exclusion of the entire perceived world and hence in no wise accessible to experience. Yet covered by this homogeneous materiality as an intentional object is another intended objectivity: temporal possibility. Here again we encounter a live awareness that intends such an objectivity to be an empty will, prior to the question of its being free or determined. Phenomenologically speaking, there can be eternal possibilities, as Plato and Husserl (1962) have noted, but such possibilities have been already enacted theologically and in part metaphysically. Modern thought rejects eternal possibilities and is left with temporal, although in the first lived intentionality, empty temporal possibilities. It is to be noted that the term 'temporal' does not suggest 'being in time', but an open horizon without any specific ontological locus. Hence any temporal location would have to be established within such a horizon. If we attend to the language of modern thought up to date, we shall note that subtending the question of 'reality' there is a prior discourse concerning the 'conditions for the possibility of reality'. Such discourses are premised on the first lived intentionality of empty temporal possibility. It opens a horizon of possible intentions and their fulfillment, requiring a second constitution of objectivities: possible valuations of what the will intends as valuable for us, but recalling that at this level all value possibilities are open as temporal. In principle, it is possible for us to be all that we will as valuable in time. This is alpha and omega of modern thought: empty temporal possibility and its temporal fulfillment by all that we value as our mode of final being. Marxism and capitalism, and even Heidegger's ontology, offer the same intentionality. The intentionality of fulfillment of possible valuations as temporal does not lead to perceptual awareness, since the latter, in its naturalistic mode, is quite limited and merely qualitative. Hence the fulfillment requires a constructive intentionality that can establish possible conditions for possible reality. One minor aspect for this establishment is the shift of reason to instrumental rationality whose task is to calculate what reality is valuable for us and then calculate the conditions how such reality shall be achieved. Values, in this sense, are calculations of possible results realised solely as material. To achieve any value, the human has to be reduced to a system of interests, needs, desires and power and all must act aggressively against others to fulfill such wants. Indeed, language itself is split into numerous technical discourses which allow the construction of the environment in constantly changing forms. Suddenly we realise that what we encounter in our visible environment, whether automobiles, electric implements, computers, telephones and media systems, are, in fact, embodied discourses.

The smart phone has all sorts of visual images, but they speak the numerous algorithmic discourses. No wonder that following the modern construction of multitude of discursive constructs, embedded in the environment, postmodern writers can claim that everything is a discursive construct.

WORLD OF COMMUNICATION

Going under the terminology of 'discursive practice', educational institutions (and governments) are emphasising the creation of technical disciplines in order to advance national economies, health care, competition with others and national prestige. In Central Europe, the teaching of humanities, and this includes national languages, cultures and histories, is pushed aside in favour of technical training in accordance with global standards. While this might seem trivial, yet national identities are premised on the understanding of local cultures and their difference from the globalised technological 'culture'. If the latter becomes preeminent, then the former will vanish. In this essay, this logic of 'vanishment' will be explored in detail, yet one of its major components consists of the 'detachment' of any specific technical discourse from its local culture. By virtue of gaining a technical set of skills, be they medical, computer or managerial, the members of a given nation/ethnicity become global and in their interests are more 'at home' in the global community of professionals in their area of expertise than with the members of their traditional cultures. They attend international conferences, form associations and common projects, and are accepted everywhere. It is to be noted that the proliferation of technical disciplines is without a limit: chemistry, micro-chemistry, macro-chemistry, biochemistry, genetic biochemistry, etc., all the way to the changing 'latest' and 'improved' medications. The very language of such communities is discipline specific and inaccessible to everyday discourses.

The members of the communities of specific technical fields seek better conditions to engage in their craft and either find positions or are invited by institutions to do research away from their native areas. They move from place to place where they are needed and thus settle – for a while – in a different nation and among different ethnic groups – meanwhile maintaining close ties to their community of technical peers. In this sense they become nomadic, without any national cultural allegiance or even political commitments. What is significant is that the members of these global-nomadic communities comprise a contemporary elite, separated and living apart from general populations. Being part of the global elite, they tend to promote technical programs at pedagogical institutions, thus creating an increasing gap between the elites and the populations.

While all this may sound normal, the migration of technical elites to 'better' institutions or research facilities, to better paying positions, depletes the local nations of the best means of developing their local 'brain trust' and the building of expanded economies. For example, among the former Soviet Union members, the liberated Baltic States have joined the European Union with its open-door policy that immediately began to deplete such states of the best talents. Lithuania alone, out of 3.7 million population, lost seven hundred thousand to immigration – not all are of the highest technical quality, but the best have become global nomads with high positions in every part of the world. Despite the objections to modernity, this is the ground of all attacks on it by fundamental ontology of Heidegger, Existentialism of Sartre, advocates of deconstruction and even analytic trend: *the ground is projection of a horizon of temporal possibilities of being or the transcendence of the present by the priority of possibilities, including logical constructs of possible worlds*. In fact, projectionism is an eidetic rule of most social

constructs, including Marxism and capitalism. The former is premised on a utopian project, while the latter on 'selling possible futures'.

This simply means an increased refinement of application and realisation of the discursive constructs in the material sphere. This is the technological process, technologisation posits formal operations, with a total disregard or indifference to the meaning and truth of nature in the lived world. Such formalism, coupled with the homogeneous and 'indifferent' reality, results in two structural processes when introduced in the lived world. First, a complete disregard of the perceptual phenomena and their horizons, including their enactments in the lived world, leading to increased contingency of the environment and, second, the detachment of the formal discourses and their technological implementations from intentionalities that connect the subject to the morphologies and the phenomena of the experienced environment. These points constitute the problematic of the relationship between contingency, detachment and nature. Both, the formally designed discourses and the transcendent material nature, comprise a detachment from the lived world and allow an arbitrary correlation between them. One can treat everything from a vantage point of detached formalism and regard qualitative and essential distinctions with indifference. As already suggested, the formal indifferent and disconnected constructs lend themselves to a horizontal division of discourses in such a way that there emerge increased formal differentiations of formal systems themselves. Correlatively, the material world can be increasingly differentiated and reconstructed along more complex and yet more distinct technical masteries and controls of the transcendent reality. In short, an incrementation of complexities in formal discourses and differences is coextensive with an increase in the contingency of the material domain, leading to more possible rearrangements of the indifferent material nature. Every refined and produced material process offers possibilities for further formal refinements and material rearrangements. The lateral differentiation of formal discourses and their correlative material structuration provide a basis for disciplinary differentiations, each having its own formal rules and each capable of possible construction of material realisations.

A brief note should be inserted to point out more precisely why the discussed modern philosophical and scientific trend is the condition for the possibility of discursive power. The very languages, the formal discourses and their differentiations can access the transcendent world only by remaking it, by subjecting the material to formal and technical transformations. Thus. The more one subdivides the formal domain into increasingly refined sub-discourses, the more one is able to crisscross the material by technical procedures in terms of the formal definitions. In this sense, the very discourses of the scientific fields and disciplines are coextensive with the power of shaping the indifferent material to fit the discursive requirements of such disciplines. One could argue, furthermore, that this continuous division and formalisation of discourses is coextensive with the militarisation of language and society. Each increasing refinement is correlatively a restriction of signs to signals followed by an attendant restriction of human functions to being a reaction to precise and efficient codes. In this sense, the discursive power to make leads in two directions: the making of the environment and the control of the human. In general terms, this process of militarisation is one of the bases for the emergent language of 'war'. We are at war with each other, with the environment, with poverty, with affluence, with our own divided selves and with other civilisations (Mickunas 2019).

We cannot speak of some natural 'needs' since the latter are part and parcel of the *possibilising* discourses and become at the same time needs and fulfillment. We can make it, therefore

we want it, and we wanted it therefore we can make it. What this suggests is that the process of increased contingency and arbitrariness as sources of power comprises a self-referential domain. This means that there are no restrictions for the 'search for truth'. After all, such a search has lost any boundary and any distinction between knowledge and object. Even in social understanding, the relationship between the formal discourses and material processes is determined by 'science', i.e. the very self-articulation and production. One, thus, cannot find any trans-scientific criteria to check this process. And each domain has no built-in reason to stop the proliferation of its own form of knowledge and praxis. There are no physical reasons to cease making more physical experiments and refinements, no economic reasons to stop the economic 'growth', no biological reasons to remold the living processes along new combinations, etc. Any limitation would be regarded as an infringement on the 'autonomy of research'. Any science, which would proclaim that it has become complete, would cease to be a science in the context depicted above. *It is now clear that postmodern conceptions of multi-discursivity, varied as multi-culturalism, and finally as all discourses are power, stem directly from modern understanding of all discourses as empowered to make anything that such discourses define. Postmodernity is discovered at the very heart of modernity.*

PROGRESS

The question that arises in this kind of progress, and as pointed out, its proliferation of increasing arbitrariness with respect to all phenomena, is the appearance of crisis. What is immediately notable is the disproportion between the sub-system called science and the rest of the culture. The efforts by the theoretically-methodologically designed systems to 'master' the 'material' nature have become exponential. Let us be clear about this: there can be only one domain of progress, and this is the coded and formalised transmission of practices or 'techniques'. A culture can increase its mastery and practical control through the increase of formal differentiations and physical interventions in the environment, yet it cannot increase what the environment as a whole has to offer. There is no 'progress' in nature. We cannot increase material resources, but only the efficiency of their uses. Only the latter can progress. And this is precisely the point of crisis: the sciences are entering human life on the basis of this 'use', i.e. making humans function in accordance with the very prescripts that are imposed on the presumed physical world. Thus the question arises: is this a progress for human life, or is this the arbitrary treatment of the human and hence the subsumption of the human under arbitrary power and its opening up of power over the human? Obviously, the 'use' and interference is inherent in the processes of modern science, requiring the intentionality which can connect the formal and the material. The human is then submitted to and subsumed under an arbitrariness which includes his own operations. That is, the human also functions in this modern intentionality and treats, or at least is exposed in principle to treat everything arbitrarily, i.e. violently. Arbitrariness is a 'power' which opens an initial experience of violation. But this violation cannot be avoided within the context of modern understanding of theory and method and their 'application'.

The brief discussion of the emergence of power in the modern tradition resulted in sign systems as all-encompassing *eidōs* of power. Other traditions should be deciphered and variations performed in order to discover the complete noetic-noematic correlation constituting power. One notion seems to be warranted in the context of our discussion: it is not the discursive limits that exercise power – after all, Greeks were capable of linguistic 'dance' within a well-designed form – but an arbitrary proclamation of a homogeneity and an imperialism

of a method that reduces all phenomena to a transcendent and reified realm that leads to a disregard not only of the limits but also the uniqueness of any individual. Arbitrary formal discourses that violate experienced limits is what will yield modern power. This can open our understanding of political rhetoric and specifically its extension toward political technocracy that subtends the so-called ‘ideological camps.’

POSTSCRIPT

No doubt, numerous thinkers of this century, specifically in hermeneutics, semiotics and linguistic analysis, have rightly argued in favour of the priority of language and its power to designate. The task of this essay was to explicate the conditions for the possibility of such views. The conditions are neither epistemic nor ontological, but more fundamentally the appearance of a set of issues that led to the selection of a certain discursive prejudgment leading to a construction of formal epistemologies and materialistic ontology. The conjunction between such epistemologies and ontology requires an introduction of mediating functions that were neither epistemological nor ontological; rather, they opened the portals to the indefinite selectivity of productive discourses leading to a demand for the transformation of the material surroundings. Such demands are, in principle, arbitrary and hence power laden and, by extension, all discourses are inherently power laden. The modern subject became subjected to its own inventions. As a saying in India goes: scholars in their silly pride, made a lion – then they died.

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ALGIS MICKŪNAS

Moderni postmodernybė ir diskursyvi galia. 2 dalis

Santrauka

Straipsnyje vadovaujamosi Vakarų moderniosios (matematinės) metafizikos ir ontologijos (atomistinio materializmo) logika, siekiant parodyti, kaip moksliniai diskursai įgavo galią kurti aplinką. Bet kurios disciplinos diskursas kuriamas remiantis jo verte, kuri turi būti taikoma medžiagoje, vienalytėje aplinkoje, kad būtų gauti norimi techniniai produktai, įskaitant genetinius, cheminius, elektroninius, fiziologinius ir kt. Taigi, kiekvienas diskursas turi „galią“ perdaryti aplinką pagal jos taisykles. Rezultatas: aplinka yra diskursyvus darinys. Tokį konstruktyvizmą priima postmodernūs rašytojai, teigiantys, kad visi diskursai yra galia, lemianti, kaip mes suprantame ir traktuojame aplinką.

Raktažodžiai: galia, pažanga, vertė, poreikiai, diskursas, sąlygos