Science vs. Postmodernism Debate

Selections from the Science vs. Postmodernism debate thread in the Philosophy Forum. All quotations are in red. Responses to the quotations are by John Donovan unless otherwise noted.

Quote:
Originally Posted by **geoff23**
This whole "self-refuting" theme seems to have been pervasive around here for a while now. Philosophy itself is "self-refuting" is it not? My profile lists my favorite philosopher as Richard Rorty - described by some as "the anti-philosophers philosopher" and accused of "blowing up philosophy".
The problem with deciding if science and Kuhnian based post-modernism are incompatible, is trying to figure out if one is talking about the "strong programme" of post-modernism or not.

Claims that science is just another narrative or way of "knowing" the world or that there is no eternal reality or is there is but we can never gain knowledge about it, are easily dismissed. Sokal and Bricmont say on the self-refutation aspect:

"Research in history, and in particular in the history of science, employs methods that are not radically different from those used in the natural sciences: studying documents, drawing the most rational inferences, making inductions based on the available data, and so forth. If arguments of this type in physics or biology did not allow us to arrive a reasonably reliable conclusions, what reason would there be to trust them in history? Why speak in a realist mode about historical categories, such as paradigms, if it is an illusion to speak in a realist mode about scientific concepts (which are in fact much more precisely defined) such as electrons or DNA?"

PoMO studies of power and influence and other social mechanisms in science are more than welcome- I view vested corporate influences in science (e.g., global warming or pharmaceuticals) a grave threat to the integrity of science.

But those who would even deny the progressive nature of science and it's efficacy in solving difficult problems, can't be taken seriously if they book a ticket and fly on an airplane to a sociology conference.

Additionally there are many radical PoMOs that will actually abuse science, equating, for example, the erect penis with the square root of negative one or claiming that fluid dynamics is sexistly ignored over mechanical physics because men are "hard and rigid" but women "leak fluids". Never mind that the Navier-Stokes equations are just plain difficult to solve.

As Sokal and Bricmont conclude, "maybe some of these philosophical musings are sound, but anyone that talks nonsense about things we do know something about, has blown their credentials when it comes to things we don't know anything about."

Quote:
Originally Posted by **Gassendi1**
_____ _____
Why does anyone think that every (scientific?) theory will be refuted? What is supposed to be the argument for that?
I agree. Science will hopefully always change and grow (non-dogmatism), but I don't think it is unreasonable to insist that we will never discover element 13 and 1/2. (This is not Harry Potter we're talking about remember).

Newton's theories of motion were not discarded because of Einstein, they are still used everyday in millions of calculations by NASA. Newton's theories were only modified for cases where relative velocities

approach the speed of light.

Besides the already admitted worthiness of PoMo investigations involving power, wealth, historical setting, etc. on the business and art of science, I'd like to know what value postmodernism has added to our understanding of the world. That is besides a lot of 'noise and confusion signifying little'.

"Science is a tribute to what we can know, even though we are fallible"- Jacob Bronowski

Quote:
Originally Posted by **darkcrow**
Probe *if a theory is modified does that mean changed? If changed is it the same theory?*
I really don't want to get into a debate about meanings of words- the postmodernist's delight.

Theories change and are modified- sometimes they are even discarded. It's not important how we classify the meaning of these words- as long as we get the job done. An atom of Dalton's isn't the same atom of modern physics- but we still call it an atom. The point being that science continually adapts to a greater understanding of our natural world.

Quote:
Originally Posted by **Tobias**
The fact that it happened all throughout history. We know more about the workings of the world in the areas science chose to investigate. This choice, according to pomos, is based on powerrelations and the necessities of Production. the powerful class directed our attention to certain areas and not others. Why for instance do we spend an enormous amount of trying to go to mars?

Science explains certain phenomena in a certain way. So did Aristoteles. We don't accept Aristoteles' view anymore, but why do you think Einstein's view will live eternally? the fact that we can manipulate the outside world better is no guarantee that we know more about it. For all we know the universe might be a sentient creature just granting us a long spell of good luck. In any case in the middle ages that would be a prevalent opinion. They held this idea although there was more scientific progress in the middle ages than in antiquity. reg
Tobi
You have a point worth refuting. Aside from the solipsism.

Newton is best known for his theory of motion, but he also had another theory- his theory of gases. In this theory he held that gases are static particles that exhibit a repulsive force using an inverse square law. (Hey, it worked for gravity didn't it?) Today we think Newton was wrong about his theory of gases, and instead we think that a dynamical theory of gases is a more accurate description of our universe.

So you might well ask, how the heck do we get off thinking that Newton is wrong and we are (more nearly) correct? This is a very good question and to go into it fully requires much explanation about how models are used and why we think we can evaluate one model against another in scientific work. But I'm not going to do that, though I suggest "The Ascent of Science" by Brian Silver which is perfect for the philosopher because it folds in science and philosophy in a very entertaining way. Extremely readable and funny.

So, I'll just use this example and say, in fact if you quantitatively calculate Newton static theory of gases and compare it to experimental measurements, it works pretty well- but not well enough. For this reason and many, many others from observable Brownian motion to molecular Doppler effects to theoretical considerations, it is clear that today's dynamical theory of gases is a much more accurate and predictive model of how gases actually behave. So the bottom line is we're pretty sure that Newton was wrong about gases, even though we might not have it exactly right either.

The point is that every idea in science must be falsifiable, at least in principle. That is why science cannot be dogmatic. It must be possible to be wrong or it's not science. The best scientific theories expose themselves to the greatest chance of be proven wrong by making many and specific predictions of what we might be expected to observe (based on that theory). We already know, for example, that quantum mechanics is "wrong" in some sense, because it cannot account for gravity- although it does account nicely for relativity. Whether that will mean a small modification like what was required to incorporate relativity or a major revision of the theory is still unknown.

As I've said before, studies of how science is influenced by money, politics and society and the effects of science on society are more than welcome. What we choose to spend our science dollars on is also important. The efforts of aids activists to funnel more money to effective treatments and less to basic research of the HIV virus is an good example.

But don't fall into the "strong programme" and think that the world is not real or knowable in any sense and claim that science is just "another narrative". (Besides, if the world is **unknowable**, how do you **know** that science is just another narrative?).

If science was just another narrative about the world (like for example Zuni creations myths), we'd be spending as little money and effort on science as we do on mythology.

Quote:
Originally Posted by **Tobias**
Probeman, I am aware of the falsification criterion and other predicaments of the scientific method. I am also not saying that it doesn't work. That it works is obvious. We can build microwaves now and we couldn't build them thirty years ago.
Why do you use the word "predicaments"? Falsification is a good thing- not a problem. It eliminates bad ideas from consideration. You want to hold on to bad ideas?
Quote:
Originally Posted by **Tobias**
Knowing that something works is however different from knowing why something works. Science holds a few metaphysical dogma's for the sake of convenience. Materialism is one. Nothing wrong with that as long as the method works. Now this would be a pomo reply. It holds every metaphysical position as fine as long as it doesn't become dangerous. If this position doesn't exclude another, no pomo will have a problem with science. That is all I am saying.
I think that accepting all positions regardless of their intellectual merit is a dangerous thing- don't you? I mean if you are really interested in gaining knowledge and understanding.
Quote:
Originally Posted by **Tobias**
I will ask you how do you know that this is not another narrative. In the Middle ages before the advent of science discoveries were made. Kepler based his theory of planets on the kabbala. Newton was next to an expert on gasses and gravity, an alchemist. People made discoveries in the theory of crystalline spheres, not to mention in theology. Discoveries can be made based on metaphysical assumptions, but these assumptions do not have to be true because they led to discovery.
I know that it's not just an arbitrary narrative because, the Church (for just one example) couldn't explain the motion of the planets- but we can.
Quote:
Originally Posted by **Tobias**
Your last point is moot because every culture spends lots of time and energy in the narrative they hold to be the one and only one at the time. In the middle ages they spend their whole budgets building cathedrals, because that was their 'truth'. And it worked! Oh yes, God was good, no one doubted that.regards Tobi
But it didn't work, that's just my point- because they didn't have a scientific understanding of engineering, a number of cathedrals collapsed under their own weight. Or do think it was that "good" God that made them collapse?

Quote:
Originally Posted by **Tobias**
No no, not at all. I think the scientific method is great. It has given us a large amount of control over the outside world.
Then why use the word "predicament?
Quote:
Originally Posted by **Tobias**
The Pomo inquiry is about who decides what has intellectual merit and on what grounds. PoMo inquiry deals with the attribution of 'intellectual merit'. A pomo doesn't accept any position. In that respect he is close to a skeptic. A pomo would check why in the present day and age we hold certain positions and not others.
Well I would prefer that doctors should have some say (not the only say however) on medical matters, plumbers on plumbing matters and scientists on scientific matters.

From the PoMO reading I've done they seem to very uncritical of other PoMO studies and disparaging of everything else outside of PoMO. Have you read of the abuses of math and physics by PoMOs? Read "Fashionable Nonsense" by Sokal and Bricmont- if you dare.
Quote:
Originally Posted by **Tobias**
Like I said Kepler based a nice model of the motion of planets based on Kabbala, but that is even beside the point here. We can explain the movement of planets better than the church could because we have stronger telescopes. We have stronger telescopes because we reached a higher expertise in the cutting of lenses. That however doesn't mean that we are one bit closet to understanding the 'meaning' of the movement of planets. I do not have to accept materialism just because we have a stronger lens now and see the planets more accurately.
No- I don't agree at all. Kepler's theory was not accepted because of any "basis". He could have dreamed it and it wouldn't have mattered. It still required testing. The fact that it did match mathematical predictions (before telescopes, by the way) went towards it's acceptance. The technology helped to convince even more (phases of Venus, etc) that the theory was an accurate model. **You (like many in PoMo) entirely miss the point. Kepler's laws were not accepted because of technology- Kepler's laws were accepted IN SPITE of technology.** Simply because if Kepler was wrong, the technology would have demonstrated that, as it has so often done so with many other theories now on the trash heap of science.

What you mean by "meaning" of the motion of the planets I have no idea. But I suspect you're bringing the notion of "purpose" into the picture- to which science can only see- we see no evidence of "purpose", end of story.
Quote:
Originally Posted by **Tobias**
Sure, but bridges also collapse in our day and age. Of course we know more about the building of cathedrals, but that doesn't imply that I need to follow metaphysical claims science makes. It is also perfectly possible to build a cathedral or a whole pyramid without the scientific method.
Science itself makes no metaphysical claims- though some scientists do, so don't confuse them. You can build a cathedral without science- it's a lot harder but seat of the pants engineering can be impressive. Of course like I said- we only see the ones left standing.

Bridges don't collapse if they were designed "scientifically"- but sometimes contractors do cheat and mix in too much sand sometimes- but that is not a fault of science. You're mixing too many things together here yourself in this last paragraph for me to try to sort out.

Quote:
Originally Posted by **Tobias**
Like every other theory, they will be modified and eventually replaced. If they will be modified, were they ever true? How do you know by the way that they are true? Tobi

Absolute certainty in science can never be attained because, at best, we can only get closer to "the truth" (hence my signature). So scientific theories are gradually replaced by better scientific theories that explain more, predict more and more accurately. But we will never finally arrive at the truth. Beware- whenever we do think that we have "the truth", we become dangerous.

Quote:
Originally Posted by **Gassendi1**

You mean that you think it may not be true that water is H2O, and that Mars is the third planet from the Sun? How come?

Gassendi, No I'm not saying that of course- but I'll give you an example that is being discussed in the "Discussion of Dennett's 'Consciousness Explained'" in the Metaphysics and Epistemology thread that bears on this delicate issue.

But first note that yes, there are some scientific theories of nature that are so well established that it would be difficult to even imagine how they could be wrong. For example I doubt that there is an undiscovered element with an atomic number between Aluminum and Silicon.

That said- at the edge of science, there remains significant "wiggle room" for not only additional confirmation but even fairly radical ideas about what we believe to be "obviously" true.

Dennett's scientific theories of consciousness are in that category. What we call "consciousness", the obvious and intuitive reality of our experiences, feelings and beliefs of our mind, are maybe not functioning how we think they are. Here is a short quote from one of the posters:

"Dennett has a radical re-interpretation of the things we have in our own phenomenological zoos: “I wanted to say, ‘It turns out that the things that swim by in the stream of consciousness—you know: the pains and aromas and daydreams and mental images and flashes of anger and lust, the standard denizens of the phenom—those things are not what we once thought they were. They are really so different, in fact, that we have to find some new words for them.’”(p. 45)

And it is claims of this sort which get distorted by others as “Dennett doesn’t think there are any pains or aromas or daydreams!”(p.45).

In the pages that follow, Dennett alerts us to important facts about our beliefs concerning phenomenology, and makes a point about what counts as a robust explanation.

We do not have phenomenology in the sense that we have zoology—an agreed upon body of work about what pains and aromas and lusts are like. Instead, there seem to be as many phenomenologies as there are people. And this is, in part, because our natural intuitions about what things are like “from the inside” are often just wrong."

Warning: if you decide to join this thread I strongly suggest that you read all 10 pages (yes, ten pages) of previous discussion and read the book up to chapter 5 or you will have little chance of understanding what anyone is talking about in the thread.

Quote:
Originally Posted by **Gassendi1**

What has all this about Dennett to do with the issue?

Just that at the frontiers of science there is much greater uncertainty regarding the "facts" of science. In Galileo's day there was debate on whether heavier objects fell faster than lighter objects, today this subject

is uncontroversial.

But the debate over a scientific explanation of consciousness is today very much at the frontiers of both science and philosophy. I compare it to the Vitalist debate of the 19th century where it was assumed that living tissue must have some special non-materialistic property that distinguishes it from non-living matter. This "fact" seemed obvious to most philosophers and scientists of the day. When it was demonstrated that there was no "intrinsic" special quality associated with organic matter, it was a devastating blow to many of that time.

The belief held by many today, that consciousness must have some special, non-physical component or "spark" to be fully "aware" is, I think, a great example of science in action at the edge of knowledge.

Wouldn't you agree?

Quote:
Originally Posted by **Tobias**
Science is the tool and philosophy examines what we do with it and why we use it.
yes, **tobi.** but the chief problem with PoMo is that it equivocates the various tools in the tool-kit of culture such that the claims of science (as distinct from 'scientism') are deflated & relativized to the detriment of culture in general & science in particular. this dismissal of the factual as merely being one interpretation among many others is both insipid & reactionary. (it's *insipid* because it's a misuse of philosophy (e.g making metaphysical claims to refute the possibility of making metaphysical claims!) & *reactionary* because it excludes any factual basis for crimes, injustices, problems, etc against which *resistance* can be organized ...) PoMo criticizes the misuse of science (e.g. scientism) by *mischaracterizing* 'scientism' as the prevailing use of science (particularly by scientists) which amounts to little more than masturbating strawmen. i'm sure you're familiar with alan sokal's "hoax" ...

if not, i recommend:

Fashionable Nonsense by Alan Sokal
The Sokal Hoax by The Editors of Lingua Franca

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"The universe is change, life is opinion." -- Marcus Aurelius

only liquor requires proof

Last edited by 180 Proof : 02-13-04 at 03:31 AM. Reason: adjusting my "framework" for greater commensurability ...

Quote:
Originally Posted by **Gassendi1**
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I, myself, am not clear what it is about consciousness that needs explaining. But I feel sure that any explanation will be an evolutionary one. A biological one. Not something in philosophers have any special competence.

_____

.That there is some disagreement in some areas of science does not imply there are not vast areas in which there is nearly total agreement.

Agreed. I also think you are correct that consciousness can be understood from a biological and evolutionary perspective. But I also think that social evolution has added aspects to our consciousness that may require some additional input for accurate models of cognitive behavior and processes. Dennett is actually one of the most evolution based philosopher-scientists today. His book "Darwin's Dangerous Idea" makes clear that evolution has wonderful, exciting and sometimes unsettling implications that haven't even begun to be absorbed by most people. He calls evolutionary theory "the universal acid" because it strips away all our silly human presumptions and lays bare our pathetic chauvinism and provincialism for us to see.

Because his philosophy is informed by science- it can also inform science. At least provide ideas for fruitful investigation. I think you might be very impressed with his straight forward, though unintuitive explanations of consciousness.

Science is often like that, as Alan Cromer's book entitled "Uncommon Sense" makes clear; science is based on common sense but because it tests it's ideas empirically, it often arrives at very surprising and unintuitive conclusions.

Here I am defending a philosopher from a scientist- yet I've been accused of "scientism".

Quote:

Originally Posted by **lights**

Surprisingly science and technology do not depend upon the belief in an objective absolute truth. Just drop the faith and see what happens!

Postmodern science would be no less powerful than the materialism and ultra rationalist science of previous philosophies that used it to validate their own vision.

This is so bad, it's not even wrong. Therefore, I don't even know where to start.

Deep breath! First of all science does premise that there is an external reality and that we can gain some tentative knowledge about it. Just like your plumber does. Saying "absolute truth" is conflating the idea of "facts" (external reality) with our "knowledge of facts" (science). A typical PoMO tactic.

Second PoMO science is an oxymoron. Because PoMO considers all facts and positions equally valid, no criticism is tolerated. PoMO science would instantly come to a screeching halt as every half baked idea that one can conceive of is thrown into the mix.

Third, (and I don't know how many times I've had to say this), "methodological materialism" which is a process by which science explains the world without recourse to entities that offer no explanation (the supernatural for example), is a distinctly different and discrete idea from "philosophical materialism", which is a philosophy that only material processes are operative in the universe today.

One can be a scientist and do good scientific work and still believe in gods or fairies- but you can't use either of them in your explanations of the universe if you expect to increase our knowledge.

Finally I would say that although (and I've said this before too) POMO could, in principle at least, offer insight into how science is influenced by politics, money and power. Unfortunately as long as the basic

agenda of so much of PoMo seems to be anti-intellectual, it's not clear how they could actually ever learn anything of interest to those that find value in scholarly work and critical thinking.

Quote:
Originally Posted by **lights**
I note that you didn't address the central theme that within a culture that predominantly celebrates diversity and complexity that such a philosophical drive could lead to perfectly good science. As opposed to simply trying to reduce everything to a grand unified field theory it might also officially support the search for endless complexity underpinning the physical universe. Such a profound philosophical shift is quite possibly coincident with the recognition that man is no longer in control of the man made, let alone nature. Realizations and understandings like this in our everyday lives profoundly affect the direct of imagination.

Ok, I'll respond. One nice thing about science, say for example, geology, is that all over the world (Egypt, Japan, France, Brazil, any culture, anywhere), all geologists can find basic fundamental agreement on the "facts". Not so for religion and "other ways of knowing". I think that speaks volumes about how race, culture and diversity are all invisible to science.

Quote:
Originally Posted by **lights**
You ridicule the pomo tendency of every half baked idea going into the pot. It is precisely that attitude that has been responsible for some of our greatest scientific discoveries! Many a radical theory was ridiculed to start with. The method sorts them out. It is quite possible that science at any time could move forward more quickly by the grand narrative attitude being relaxed. I am surprised to find someone so quickly who cannot entertain that possibility and its relationship to pomo.

"It is quite possible that science at any time could move forward more quickly by the grand narrative attitude being relaxed." You must be speaking another language- oh right, PoMobonics.

You're conflating again! I can dream or hallucinate an idea for a scientific theory- but it's not ever going to become a scientific theory unless someone does a lot of critical, analytical, quantitative, empirical and reproducible thinking and testing. Where do most of those half-baked ideas end up? On the trash heap of science- that's why we can have a little bit of confidence that the ones that remain (those that have exposed themselves to falsification and withstood empirical testing) might at least have some small temporary value.

You say "the method sorts them out". But how exactly? How do humans manage to figure out which ideas are accurate representations of the universe and which ones are pseudo-science wishful thinking? Based on the PoMO reading that I've done and their abuses of math, physics and science in general, the answers to these questions are NOT determined by PoMos claiming that the square root of negative one is equal to the erect penis! See Lacan, "The subversion of the subject and the dialectic of desire in the Freudian unconscious", pp 318-320.

I'm not saying that PoMOs are the only ones that are guilty of sloppy thinking on this planet, but they do seem to wallow in it.

Quote:
Originally Posted by **darkcrow**
I don’t consider all facts and positions equally valid and I welcome all the criticism you can muster up. So if anything is half-baked it’s your straw man.

Good for you! Criticism is where the wheat is separated from the chaff.

I'm criticizing PoMo not you anyway. Specifically as Faustus says, there are many in the PoMO "strong programme" that would say that science is "just another way of knowing." I criticize this position and those of Bloor and Barnes who claim that "it is those who oppose relativism, and who grant certain forms of knowledge a privileged status, who pose the real threat to a scientific understanding of knowledge and

cognition."

If they want to provide a sociological but "scientific understanding of knowledge and cognition" aren't they already claiming a "privileged status" with regard to other discourses, for example those of "rationalists"?

They can't even keep from refuting themselves!

Quote:
Originally Posted by **lights**
I have to say that the Sokal hoax doesn't alter my respect for pomo one jot. The whole point of pomo is that there is no overall authority, and you don't even have to be aware of that to contribute to it. That a bunch of cultural study academics were fooled is neither here nor there to me. After all they aren't doing science. Are we supposed to be impressed that they somehow represent pomo? Am I supposed to be subsequently embarrassed by their daft behavior? Because I don't feel it. I know what you mean by it being dangerous to make generalizations about pomo. The danger is that you sound like an authority. Unavoidable really the moment you put forward your interpretation about anything!

What is interesting about that hoax is that in a perverse way it actually confirmed pomo. The idea that nonsense scientific understanding is spreading, and it is, just demonstrates the point doesn't it? It IS happening. When it comes to practicing science as compared to talking about it, the method sorts it all out, so where is the problem? The rest is general culture where as far as I am aware utter bollocks has always held a great sway throughout history anyway, so it is hardly a criticism of today. It's just that today we all have much more opportunity to spout drivel on a multitude of public platforms. You get a much wider selection of garbage nowadays. Does that mean there is more nonsense than before, when a few grabbed the conch shell and spoke for all of us? I don't think so. Just more diverse. It is precisely that diversity of thought and freedom of choice that I think could change science, as well as proliferate its cultural interpretation.

I don't know whether to laugh or cry. Freedom to choose between what? Nonsense and superstition?

So knowledge, scholarship, evidence and intellectual honesty mean nothing to you? Your position reminds me of Kurt Vonnegut's "Welcome to the Monkey House" where the perfect egalitarian society is enforced by various devices and surgeries so that everyone is exactly equal. All equally stupid, ignorant and unskilled.

Are you sure that's the world you want to live in? Where your doctor is just as unskilled and ignorant as the patient? Where excellence and achievement are mocked and the uninformed and uneducated are media heroes for us to emulate?

But you are right- the editors of Social Text weren't doing science, they weren't doing any thinking of any kind at all.

Quote:
Originally Posted by **lights**
uh yeh you got there in the end. They weren't doing science. Guess what, I wouldn't consult them with an illness either.

"So knowledge, scholarship, evidence and intellectual honesty mean nothing to you? "

what in gods name are you talking about?

You seem to have a lot in common with those who bought the sokal hoax, only with you it is the reverse paranoia that pomo will bring about the end of civilization as we know it.

Hello. Reality calling. Lets not panic shall we.

The reality is that critical and rational thinking have all but disappeared from more than a few humanities departments. The "Sokal Hoax" is just the tip of a very large and rotten iceberg, in representing the dumbing down of students seeking a B.A today in the university. One of the editors of Social Text (Fuller) dedicated one of his books (I'm paraphrasing from memory), "to all the science teachers I never had. This book could only have been written without them." Yes, let's all wallow in our ignorance and wear it with pride.

But you say, let's not panic just yet, though it would appear from the bulk of PoMO writings, that the end of scholarship in academia wouldn't bother most of them at all.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **darkcrow**

I think what you are doing is akin to handing someone a dictionary for an explanation of what you mean. Either you have an argument or you don't. Either way is fine by me, I just don't understand how you can explain something to yourself that can't be explained to me and if you explain it to yourself by saying Popper is right, what is he right about?

What I also wonder is why in the world do you think I have not read Popper, just because I don't agree. But you see we can exchange and clarify whereas Popper and I can't. Doesn't that make sense to why I want to hear your argument?

I'm not making any assumptions, by suggesting that you read the book I would have thought. You can always tell me that you've read it and that you agree or disagree on this or that basis.

I'll give you his conclusions though- Popper would agree that communication can sometimes be difficult, even for two people speaking the same language and with the same metaphysical assumptions.

When we add in different cultures, different languages, different metaphysical assumptions, etc. we make things even more difficult for communication- but NOT impossible.

Popper would say that the very nature of the greater difficulty in communication between different "frameworks" makes the effort to communicate all the more worthwhile. Making the effort to communicate, especially when it is most difficult, means that the opportunities for learning are increased and hence the rewards for doing so are greater. He says it better than me of course.

I merely used science as an example of communication that cuts across cultural boundaries, because I'm most familiar with it. I never said there weren't other ways to communicate or ideas that weren't valuable.

What's valuable about science and scientists is that it gives us a working and successful model for communication between cultures and across economic disparities. Instead of killing each other over political ideologies or religious dogmas- they cooperate and work together to accomplish something. Not a common experience for the human race otherwise.

And if your "alternative" philosophies could be so successful at technology and understanding as "my" philosophical kind- why don't they go ahead and be successful? Your assertion is laughable, because PoMO navel gazing, turgid prose and wishful thinking accomplishes squat in the real world.

Science (and plumbing) is hard work, requiring clear thinking and empirical testing- it is necessary to do more than pontificate poetically, as so many PoMos demonstrate.

As far as your last statement goes, I do think it's an interesting question which I have posted before. Does the apparent success of the materialistic assumption that science uses as a premise, allow us to draw any

inferences as to whether there are indeed any non-materialistic (or supernatural) processes active in the universe?

Quote:
Originally Posted by **lights**
thanks for taking the time to show those quotes. Genuinely. I enjoyed them. But I ask you, what does it prove other than postmodernism is happening! Diversification of theory and practice, the new freedom to publish.

I can only assume that you are much more impressed by consistent authority. And why not? But why exclusively? Its up to you.

I'm impressed by consistent critical thinking- not verbal spasms of non-meaning spittle. It's all too easy to be ignorant and uncouth without understanding, but it's rational intellectual pursuit that is difficult for humans- and it's very difficulty makes it worth the effort. If you want to wallow in a diversity of nonsense- that is certainly your right.

You're obviously very young- so good luck in your education- I hope you (and your parents) are getting your money's worth out of it.

Quote:
Originally Posted by **lights**
Personally, tosh like the above (within the proviso of context that you yourself commented upon) is fine by me! Which is to say that it doesn't frighten me that people have the right to influence others with it. I think perhaps that is at the heart of many a protest against pomo as expressed already in this thread. "We must censor nonsense! It will proliferate unless we take back the reins! Shout as loudly as you can as you wave the guilty pieces of paper above your head. Are these publications not physical proof of regression!" lolol

Has it not occurred to you that the extraordinary relies upon the context of the ordinary? That an increase in complexity can change the nature of the base as well as the divine? That previously we had silence where now we have gibberish.

I'd rather have the silence frankly.

Quote:
Originally Posted by **lights**
But I ask you, what does it prove other than postmodernism is happening!

It shows that the field has almost no standards of credibility, good writing, clarity, responsibility to evidence, and that even its supposed stars are guilty of the most absurd statements. Do YOU agree that literacy is a bad thing?

Remember, I consider my own philosophy to be postmodern in some sense. But quite a lot of dreadful crap is being propagated in its name, and I don't want to be associated with it. Having high standards is always a good thing, and does not preclude having an open, curious mind. You admitted a couple of times that you agree some of the PoMo literature is nonsense—but how could you make such a casual assertion without applying standards that leading intellectuals in the field do not have?

Quote:
Originally Posted by **lights**
I think perhaps that is at the heart of many a protest against pomo as expressed already in this thread. "We must censor nonsense!"

No one is talking about censorship. The way you fight ridiculous ideas is by pointing them out.

Quote:
Originally Posted by **lights**

An increase in utter bollocks spoken on the dance floor does not preclude a drop in the standards of music. Unless of course you believe that the attempts of a classical audience to sit quietly necessarily means that the music being listened to is 'better' than that at a rock concert.

First, if “bollocks” doesn’t imply a drop in standards, then what does it mean to call something “bollocks”? And I have no idea what you are getting at when you try to make PoMo into the sci-fi lovin’, punk rockin’ alternative to classical music and literature. I prefer good science fiction to classic literature and industrial/punk to classical music (my avatar is from an alternative music magazine cover). These aren’t the issues.

Quote:
Originally Posted by **lights**
Pomo is happening and I can see that it is easily possible that it will pollute scientists into new imagination, new postulates and the new technological manifestations that result.

No, postmodernism isn’t going to offer anything to science, at least not the kind being criticized here. Example: recently in India, fundamentalist Hindu’s used the writings and philosophies of postmodern relativists to justify storming a research library and burning hundreds, perhaps thousands of scholarly works and archeological finds. They said that by publishing a book that questioned some elements of Hindi mythology, the university was oppressing them.

Ideas are not always harmless fun. They have consequences.
Faustus

Quote:
Originally Posted by **darkcrow**
Agh, the Tomb of the forgotten philosopher is filled to overflowing with those who spewed nonsense. The same fate awaits those today who spew nonsense.

It appears to me there was no beginning to postmodern inquiry, one that had a formulated premise and conclusion that stating what it represented; to the contrary it seems to me that the postmodern began as a rejection of analytic philosophy as the only means of explaining the process of, and establishing truth and knowledge.

No question that as a field it's as disorganized and incoherent as it sounds- I only was describing one of it's many over the top claims. It's interesting in a way, that many of the PoMo's claims actually make reasonable sense when they don't try to overreach. I'm going to roughly paraphrase some PoMo claims that I've come across (banal versus strong claims):

1. Anthropologists should be neutral during their investigations- but that doesn't mean that communication or comparison between cultures or "paradigms" is impossible- only difficult. And that alone makes it worth the effort.

2. Diversity is generally a good thing- but not a diversity of, say, murder or even a diversity of unmitigated nonsense. To follow up on this, one might ask: "Who gets to decide what is nonsense?" and my answer would be: "We all get to decide. Go ahead and spout nonsense if you like- but just be prepared to take your lumps"

3. New ideas are interesting and valuable- but that doesn't mean that "anything goes". Novelty alone is not enough- "meaning" counts for something too.

4. Objective knowledge is difficult to ascertain at times- but that doesn't mean that reality doesn't exist or that it is impossible to gain some tentative knowledge about it. It certainly doesn't mean that all "ways of knowing" are equally successful for gaining knowledge about the universe.

5. Politics, social status, wealth and other factors are sometimes involved in scientific debates and

controversies- but that doesn't mean that those factors ultimately decide the merit or acceptance of scientific theories. Explanatory power, agreement with other data and existing theories, falsifiable predictions and empirical tests eventually dominate as self-correcting forces in scientific inquiry.

Quote:
Originally Posted by **lights**
...accompanying breakdown of grand narrative authority is due to the very introduction of new media technology! The recording device in the hands of ordinary people, the web site also, the capitalistic demand of ordinary folk to chuck out that classical shit and have a good time, all feeds the process. That is why we hear more nonsense nowadays, because the technology allows us to hear it.

"grand narrative authority"? What kind of a strawman is this? One reason "the method" works is exactly because there is NO "grand narrative authority" in science. Every scientist is out for their own personal fame and posterity- if a scientist could falsify natural selection, believe me they would- and get the Nobel prize!

Quote:
Originally Posted by **lights**
Pomo has had an obvious effect upon music, art and literature, and yes of course there is a lot of crap to compare to the small amounts that were published before. That was because people generally couldn't afford to buy it, so those who did demanded something to their taste and bias and indoctrination. Nowadays media is easily affordable and to some extent is becoming a free product attached to advertising. As a result there has been a proliferation of styles and forms. To ignore that and just choose the crap to place alongside a dickens novel is to miss the point.

This sounds like crass consumerism. Quantity over quality- is that what you're saying? Let's buy 10 cheap tin plated socket sets from China that break the 2nd time you use them, instead of 1 good set that lasts a lifetime. Right.

Quote:
Originally Posted by **lights**
...The method defines science not the intellectual bias behind it.

Yes, an intellectual bias towards critical thinking as opposed to pretend profundity.

Quote:
Originally Posted by **lights**
And abandon the idea of a big daddy or an authoritative elite to check your ideas Feeling lost by any chance? Need someone to tell you that you are doing it right?

This is such a ridiculous and backwards misunderstanding of how science actually functions I'm not even sure where to start. Listen, despite what your teachers may have told you, as a scientist that has seen blood on the floor, I can assure you that science thrives on challenges to authority. Every scientific theory that has been falsified is a testament to that process. On the other hand, I see that Anthro departments continue to play politics as usual without regard to empirical reality (since that's all they actually have to play with). It's actually the PoMo's that constantly appeal to the pretentious wordplay and authority of Foucault, Lacan, Derrida, etc. to suppress internal criticism and create fear.

One benefit the Sokal Hoax had was to embolden many in Literature and other Humanities departments to finally speak out and say "We've been too fearful to say it, but yes, he's right- this is all a bunch of crap, and I'm glad he showed everyone the lack of academic credibility and rational scholarly standards in these so called philosophers."

PoMo likes to say that everything is "politics", but as Richard Feynman said: "For a successful technology, reality must take precedence over public relations, for Nature cannot be fooled."

Quote:
Originally Posted by **darkcrow**

I don't have a problem with objective knowledge or reality, I can reach out and touch it, in fact I don't even have to reach out. I can tell you what is true if I'm there.

Now tell me, if you will how you get knowledge other than first hand? Unless there is something distinctly different about you, than I, then we get it the same way, ***what someone else said about it.***

This is a great question. It is absolutely true that scientists have to have a measure of trust in each other's work and believe to a reasonable degree that the published paper they just read is not a deliberate faking of data. Every scientist cannot reproduce every other scientist's experimental results- although it does happen more often than you might think, especially on occasions when a particularly surprising or strange result is claimed.

Because of this trust, scientists guard their reputation for honestly and integrity with an almost sacred zeal. If ever a scientist is even suspected of having lied or faked data, he or she is immediately and forever ostracized from the scientific community- it's not like politics where you can always come back.

A friend of mine once wrote an open letter to students on this issue:

"Let me lay out the reasons, as I see them, why a high ethical standard is absolutely vital in science. As scientists we are participating in a centuries-long effort to understand how nature works, what laws underlie the behavior of nature, and what events have happened in the past. It is the common experience of scientists that this is a very difficult task. The laws and history of nature have proven to be remarkably well hidden, and it is easy to make mistakes in the scientific endeavor. In the effort to get correct answers, we depend on the validity of the data we collect and use, and we rely on other scientists to have been honest in all the observations they publish. We trust other workers not to have made up data, or to have selected only the data that fit their own views, or to have cheated in any way in their analysis and interpretations.

The next time you are in the Science Library, stop for a moment and look around, and appreciate the huge treasure of knowledge that is stored there, and which you can almost always trust to represent the honest results of honest research. Of course there will be much in the Library that is wrong, because getting the right answer is hard, but there is little that is dishonest.

If we could not trust the work of the vast majority of other scientists, the scientific enterprise would be hopeless. Any lapse in ethical behavior by any scientist is a threat to the great quest for understanding that we have joined. It is for this reason that those few scientists who violate scientific ethics are absolutely despised. Among working scientists, anyone who violates the unwritten code immediately becomes a pariah. And there is no court where you are innocent until proven guilty. Even a suspicion will damage one's reputation, perhaps irreparably. It thus behooves each scientist to behave in such a way as to remain absolutely above suspicion."

Darkcrow, I hope that answers your question a little.

Quote:
Originally Posted by **darkcrow**
Surely you don't mean that as an argument for the proposition that: , (but it sounds that way to me) Scientist peruse truth with a 'higher ethical standard' than philosophers.

This deserves an answer but it has be handled, shall we say, delicately?

I'll only say that because scientists deal with replicated data and empirically testable theories, they know that they can very easily be proved wrong, so they tend to be careful not to "overplay their hand."

Lights, your thesis seems to be that nonsense written by postmodernists is excusable because it is a young discipline, more people have access to publishing, and a certain percentage of nonsense is always to be

found, whatever the domain.

This is incorrect. Postmodernism has been attracting criticism because many of its leading intellectuals encourage nonsense and even defend it. These are the people—and I quoted a few—who are supposed to be the equivalent of Dickens in their fields. It is unique in that so many practitioners encourage sloppiness and intellectual laziness.

You wrote, “And anyway the cream always rises to the top so what are you worried about?” I’ve two reactions to that. First, bad ideas cause damage—as my example from India demonstrates. Second, the way you get the cream to rise to the top is by vigorously dismantling bad ideas so that all that is left is the cream. That is what criticism of postmodernism does—so why does it trouble you so much?

It doesn’t need to be this way. You can have high standards and still grasp the many valid points behind some of the wilder claims made in its name.

Richard Rorty is a postmodernist philosopher I admire—his type of postmodernism would be an example of cream, and thankfully, he has already risen to the top. In talking about how scholars “represent reality” in their work, he gave an example of a “good historian,” but the moral could be applied to science, math, etc.:

”When we say that good historians accurately represent what they find in the archives, we mean that they look hard for relevant documents, do not discard documents tending to discredit the historical thesis they are propounding, do not misleadingly quote passages out of context, tell the same historical story among themselves that they tell us, and so on. To assume that a historian accurately represents the facts as she knows them is to assume that she behaves in the way in which good historians behave.”

Rorty’s larger point was to criticize naively Realist metaphysics in the philosophy of science, to show that you can get the job done without having grand metaphysical foundations. This was perhaps what you were getting at when you talked about a confusion between science and philosophy. But note than in making this point, instead of throwing standards out the window, or disparaging them as some kind of frightened kowtowing to “Authority,” Rorty affirms those standards as the very thing that gets the job done.

The editors of *Social Text* do not practice those standards. They were and are lazy and gullible. They printed the Sokal paper because their philosophy places no value on accuracy, honesty, and fact checking. In addition to just writing jargon filled nonsense, Sokal deliberately inserted out right lies and factually incorrect statements in his paper. In any other discipline, the editors—not being experts in the science used in the paper—would have practiced something called “peer review”. That’s where you hand off a manuscript to scholars well read in the subject matter and have them look it over, checking for mistakes of this kind. The mistakes Sokal placed in the text were so elementary that anyone with knowledge of mathematics or quantum theory would have been able to spot them and recommend that the paper be rejected. But no—because the editors of *Social Text* recognized the sort of jargon they liked, because they also liked the conclusion, and most importantly, because they loved the ring of scientific “Authority” the paper would bring to their philosophy, they went ahead and published the paper anyway.

And this is something you think somehow proves the point of postmodern philosophy. Yeah, I sure agree. How is this a good thing?
Faustus

Quote:
Originally Posted by **lights**
Well now there is a new cultural context emerging. That demon banging at your door. lolol well you carry on drawing your pentagrams and lighting the candles.
The last part, sounds a bit more like your "line of work", if you ask me.

Sorry, but there nothing revolutionary about your "new cultural context". Ignorance, superstition and obscurantism have been around for a long, long time. If you actually read some real history, you might have known that.

Quote:
Originally Posted by **darkcrow**
More argument, and overall sounds convincing, that in fact, 'Scientist peruse truth with a 'higher ethical standard' than philosophers.' Because, and here we add your argument.

Well, off the top of my head I don't have an argument that it's not true.

But of course that is too far off topic, maybe a new thread?

BTW Richard Feynman's epistemology and ontology, others argue, has slipped back to Modern, as well as some of the others you mentioned.
Instead of "slipped back" to modern, maybe others would argue that Feynman and others have "climbed back" to modern.

Yes, I think it would be another thread, along the lines of a claim that Geof23 made in the consciousness thread, that in the "intellectual pecking order", philosophy is higher than science. Of course, I wonder if someone else might claim that religion is even higher than both in "intellectual pecking order" because religion attempts to "explain" the "purpose" of everything.

It is amusing to see various disciplines jockeying for "intellectual" or "ethical" eminence I have to say. Kind of like: which is "better", chemistry or physics? I would rather just leave it all alone by saying that **all of fields of intellectual study** can have merit and usefulness, so long as they value and maintain standards of honest and critical inquiry. Something that seems to have eluded more than a few (though not all) practitioners of PoMo studies.

Quote:
Originally Posted by **lights**
I can barely bothered to do this……

Signing off bored and tired of hearing the same old prejudiced crap from pomo hating analytical philosophers and scientists who typically cannot see the difference between what is method, what is drive and what is philosophical context.
Lights, If it's any consolation to you- I was just as "bored and tired" by your feeble attempts to extricate yourself from your own incoherent oxymorons.

For the rest of you, I'm sure it's been said before, but it's occurred to me that the extreme anti-intellectualism that PoMOs like Lights seem to promote, have unsettling similarities to the citizen mind set in Orwell's 1984, where diametrically opposed aspects of humanity are equated and banalized. For example, in 1984 the government asserts: "Beauty is Ugly", "War is Peace", etc., and the extreme PoMo relativists proclaim, "Science is Religion", "Critical Inquiry is Close-minded", "Diversity of Nonsense is Freedom of Thought" and "Mediocrity is Egalitarian"

But, in spite if Lights' wild claims, I'm not too worried about the future of PoMO philosophy and even English departments in general. The self refuting nature and dearth of any interesting and useful results from extreme PoMo relativism will eventually result in self-extinction of these unscholarly and nihilistic antics.

But in the meantime, I'm going to encourage people in general and students in particular, to think critically and "for themselves".

Quote:
Originally Posted by **geoff23**
I think you are wrong. So does Thomas Kuhn.
You also once claimed that Andy Clark's writings showed Dennett was wrong.

Somehow I suspect that you probably screwed up Kuhn's word's as well- just as most postmodern relativists have. It's interesting how later in life Kuhn tried to distance himself from the radical PoMo interpretations that some have twisted from his writings.

Actually the problem with Kuhn is that, as the philosopher Tim Maudlin has said, there are really two Kuhns- The "moderate" Kuhn where he admits that scientific debates of the past were correctly settled, but emphasizes that the evidence was generally weaker than was thought at that time and that non-scientific considerations sometimes were involved temporarily. No scientists I know would question this obvious and banal observation, though historians may argue about the extent to which these ideas are correct in specific situations.

And there is Kuhn's "immoderate brother", who (perhaps involuntarily) became one of the founding fathers of relativism, and thinks that changes in paradigm are principally due to non-empirical factors, that once accepted so condition our perceptions that they can ONLY be confirmed by subsequent observations. This is false because while it is true that scientific experiments do not provide their own interpretation, it is also true that theories do not determine the perception of results.

Aristotle presented with a moon rock would have no difficulty in discerning it as an object not fundamentally different from terrestrial materials. So much for Kuhn.