The word "postmodernism" has been rendered almost useless by being used to mean so many different things. If you read a random dozen out of the thousands whose title contain this term, you will find at least half a dozen widely different definitions of the word. I have often been urged that we would be better off without it—-that the word is simply too fuzzy to convey anything. For purposes of this lecture, however, I shall take a different tack. Even if the word "postmodern" is hopeless, its popularity among the intellectuals could use an explanation. So I shall offer a suggestion about why so many intelligent and reflective reflective people seem to think that everything has become quite different in relatively recent times.

Infinitely various as the definitions of "postmodernism" one encounters are, most of them have something to do with a loss of unity. My hunch is that this sense of loss is the result of a linkup between a philosophical movement which is now about a century old, and a recently dawning consciousness that the old democracies of Europe and North America are unlikely to provide models for the rest of the world. The sense that everything has recently fallen into pieces, I shall suggest, results from combining a renunciation of the traditional theologico-metaphysical belief that Truth is One with a loss of a faith that history will culminate in the universal adoption of liberal, democratic, institutions. The renunciation was stimulated in the middle of the last century by Darwin's explanation of where we came from. The loss of faith began toward the end of this century when it
became clear that Europe is no longer in command of the planet, and that the socio-political future of humanity has become utterly unforeseeable.

Freud famously said that Copernicus, Darwin and he himself had been responsible for successive cataclysmic decenterings—of the planet earth, of the human species, and of the conscious mind, respectively. Carrying through on this metaphor, we might say that the nineteenth century was willing to give up the claim that nature was created for our benefit in return for the sense that the human race had taken over control both of non-human nature and of its own destiny. But that sense was bound up with the belief that Europe was the center of the world, a belief which the late twentieth century is no longer able to hold. Whereas intellectuals at the end of the nineteenth century had undertaken to replace metaphysical comfort with historical hope, intellectuals at the end of this century, let down by history, are now experiencing unexpected metaphysical twinges.

My account of these changes will divide into two parts: the first emphasizes the importance of Darwin for the development of utilitarianism, pragmatism, and twentieth-century social hope. The second takes its point of departure from the account of our present historical situation offered by Clifford Geertz in his recent book, *A world in pieces*.

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Plato, and orthodox Christian theology, told us that human beings have an animal part and a divine part. The divine part is an extra
added ingredient. Its presence within us is testimony to the existence of another, higher, immaterial, invisible world: a world which offers us salvation from time and chance.

This dualistic account is plausible and powerful. We are indeed very different from the animals, and the difference seems one which mere complexity seems insufficient to explain. Lucretius and Hobbes tried to tell us that complexity is in fact sufficient— that we, like everything else in the universe, are bested explained as an accidentally-produced assemblage of particles. But prior to Darwin this explanation never gained any substantial following. It was easy for Platonists and Christians to convince people that materialist philosophies are merely perverse attempts to regress to the condition of animals.

Darwin, however, did acquire a substantial following. He made materialism respectable, for his account of the difference between us and the brutes became the common sense of the educated public. This happened for two reasons. The first was that Darwin had come up with the first detailed and plausible story of how both life and intelligence might have emerged from a meaningless swirl of corpuscles. Lucretius and Hobbes had had no concrete evolutionary narrative to offer— only an abstract, theoretical possibility. But Darwin's narrative, once its details had been filled in by Mendelian genetics and by an explosion in paleontological research, was so convincing as to threaten the entire Western theological and philosophical tradition. It was the first narrative seriously to offer a serious
challenge The Divine Comedy. An imaginative achievement on the same scale as Dante's, it offered the same combination of dramatic sweep and intellectual satisfaction.

But Darwin's theory might never have become the common sense of the European intellectuals if the ground had not been prepared by both the democratic revolutions of the late eighteenth century and the industrial revolution. These revolutions, taken together, testified to the power of human beings to change the conditions of human life. They made nineteenth-century Europeans able to feel far more confidence in our ability to take charge of our own affairs than had been possible previously. Unlike their ancestors, these Europeans felt that they could go it alone--that they could achieve perfection without reliance on a non-human power.

In previous ages, only the presence of such a power seemed able to account for the fact that we did not, or at least should not, live as the animals did. Intellectuals took for granted that we were linked to the divine either by special divine favor, or by some sort of connaturality with the divine, a resemblance betokened by our possession of the extra added ingredient which the animals lacked (the soul, or the mind). If there were no such ingredient and no such linkage, Plato had argued, the life of Socrates made no sense. For there would be no reason not to regress to the bestialty of men like Cleon and Callicles.

Both before and after Plato, religious thinkers thought of revelations from, and providential interventions by, a personal deity
or deities as necessary if men were to together in peace and concord. But in Plato and the secularist philosophical tradition which he helped to found, the divine was depersonalized, deprived of will and emotion. The theists and the secularists agreed, however, that the reason we humans can do more than just struggle to survive and breed is that we share something precious with each other which the animals lack. This precious extra gives us the ability to live in peace with one another. We cooperate with one another because we are commanded to do so, either by God or something like Kant's pure, non-empirical, faculty of Practical Reason.

But in nineteenth-century Europe and America, large numbers of intellectuals began to wonder if their predecessors might not have made too much of the idea of morality as obedience—as conformity to something like the Ten Commandments, or Plato's Idea of the Good, or Kant's categorical imperative. When Blake wrote that "one law for the lion and the ox is oppression" and Shelley that the poets were the unacknowledged legislators of the world, they anticipated a frame of mind which came to fruition with Nietzsche. This was the thought that self-creation, both individual and communal, take the place once held by obedience.

The Romantics were inspired by the success of anti-monarchist and anti-clericalist revolutions to think that obedience to authority had been simply a primitive stage of human life. Those same successes made it possible to envisage building a new Jerusalem without divine assistance—creating a society in which men and women would lead the
sort of lives which had previously seemed possible only in an invisible, immaterial, post-mortem paradise. The image of progress toward such a society—horizontal progress, so to speak—began to take the place of Platonic or Dantean images of vertical ascent. History began to replace God, Reason and Nature as a name for the source of human hope. When Darwin came along, his story of pre-human history encouraged this replacement. For it became possible to see conscious historical self-fashioning as continuous with the biological story of how species continually, albeit unconsciously, surpassed one other.

This new outburst of human self-confidence is a familiar story, as is the suggestion that Darwin's animalization of man could not have found credence in earlier times. Many historians of ideas have noted that we should not have been able to accept our full-fledged animality if we had still felt as much in need of non-human authority as had our ancestors. But I now want to make a slightly less familiar point, namely that these developments also made it possible to think that there were many different, but equally valuable, sorts of human life. It made the idea of convergence to unity less compelling. Vertical ascent suggests such convergence, but horizontal progress need not.

From Plato to Hegel, it had been natural to think of the various ways of leading a human life as hierarchically ordered. The priests took precedence over the warriors, the wise over the vulgar, the patriarchs over their wives, the nobles over the common people. Such hierarchies were constructed by calculating the relative contribution of animality and of the extra added ingredient which makes us truly
human. Women were said to have less of this ingredient than men, barbarians than Greeks, slaves than freemen, true believers than heathen, blacks than whites, and so on. The standard way of justifying both subordination and conformity was by reference to such an ingredient, and such an hierarchy. Since Plato, it has been natural to ask of any human personality type or human institution: What is its place in the Great Chain of Being? What step does it occupy on what Tennyson called "the world's great altar-stairs, that lead from Nature up to God".

After Darwin, however, it became possible to believe that nature was not leading up to anything—that nature had nothing in mind—and also that the existence of human beings was not an argument for the existence of God. This meant that humans had to dream up the point of human life, and that they could not appeal to a non-human standard to determine whether they had chosen wisely. That suggestion made radical pluralism intellectually viable. For it became possible to think the meaning of one human life might have little to do with point of any other human life, and be none the worse for that. That latter thought makes it possible to disassociate the need for social cooperation, and the consequent need to agree on what, for public purposes, should be done, from the question: What is the Good Life for Man? It makes it possible, in John Rawls' phrase, for both morals and politics to "stay on the surface, philosophically speaking".

Such developments made it possible to see the aim of social organization as freedom rather than virtue, and to see the virtues
in Meno's way rather than Socrates': as a collection of unrelated sorts of excellence. It became possible to substitute a Rabelaisian sense of the value of sheer human variety for a Platonic search for unity.

In particular, these developments helped people to see sex as no more bestial, no "lower", than any alternative source of human delight (for example, religious devotion, philosophical reflection, or artistic creation). In the twentieth century, the thought that we are free citizens of democratically ruled republics has gone hand in hand with the thought that our neighbor's sources of private pleasure are none of our business.

This latter thought is at the core of Mill's *On Liberty*, a treatise which begins with an epigraph (from Wilhelm von Humboldt) saying that the point of social organization is to encourage the widest possible human diversity. Mill had learned from the Romantics that there may be no point in grading either poems or people according to a single, pre-established scale. What counts is originality and authenticity, rather than conformity to an antecedent standard.

So for Mill and other romantic utilitarians, it became possible both to think that the only plausible answer to the question "What is intrinsically good?" is "human happiness" and to admit that this answer provides no guidance when it comes to choosing between alternative human lives. Mill knew that his and Harriet Taylor's lives were better than those of many of his fellow-citizens, just as he knew that Socrates' life was better than that of a pig. But he was willing to admit that he could not prove this to the satisfaction of those
fellow-citizens, and that democratic citizenship does not require agreement on the relative value of these sorts of lives.

The culminating moment of this line of thought comes with pragmatism's renunciation of the idea that truth consists in correspondence with reality. For this renunciation has as a corollary that the search for truth is not distinct from the search for human happiness. It also implies that there is no need to make all true propositions cohere into one unified vision, into The One True Account Of The Way Things Really Are. A French philosopher named Rene Berthelot titled his book of 1912 "Romantic Utilitarianism: a study of the pragmatist movement". That title was, I think, exactly right, as was Berthollet's suggestion that Nietzsche and James were concerned with the same question, namely: If Darwin can explain how human beings might have come to be, then what becomes of the idea of The One True Account of How Things Really Are? Can we not substitute the idea of a plurality of ways of achieving various goals (for example: reconciling the fossil record with a larger geological narrative, creating a self-image suitable for a secular society, giving meaning to our lives, and many more)?

The utilitarian idea that we have no goal save human happiness, and that no divine commandment or philosophical principle has any moral authority unless it can be subsumed under the search for happiness, has as a corollary the pragmatist claim that our desire for truth cannot take precedence over our desire for happiness. Utilitarianism and pragmatism are, just as their critics have always said, ways of
animalizing human beings. For both drop the idea of an extra added ingredient. They substitute the idea that human beings have, thanks to having invented language, a much larger behavioral repertoire than the beasts, and thus much more diverse and interesting ways of finding joy.

I shall use the term "philosophical pluralism" to mean the doctrine that there are a potential infinity of equally valuable ways to lead a human life, and that these ways cannot be ranked in terms of degrees of excellence, but only in terms of their contribution to the happiness of the persons who lead them and of the communities to which these persons belong. Pluralism, in this philosophical sense, was built into the founding documents of both utilitarianism and pragmatism.

William James, who viewed himself as following in Mill's footsteps--doing to our concept of truth what Mill had done to our concept of right action--spent half of his philosophical life crusading against the idealist doctrine that the universe and Truth must both somehow be One. In particular, he urged that science and religion could co-exist comfortably as soon as it became clear that these two areas of culture served different purposes, and that different purposes required different tools. Religious tools were needed to make possible certain kinds of human life, and not other kinds. Scientific tools were of no use for many human projects, and of great use for many others.

Nietzsche, described as "a German pragmatist" by Berthelot, agreed with James about truth. He spent much of his time campaigning
against the idea that what we call "knowledge" is more than just a set of gimmicks for keeping a certain species alive and healthy. Displaying both ignorance and ingratitude, Nietzsche mocked both Mill and Darwin, yet he had no hesitation in appropriating their best ideas. Had he lived to read James, he would probably not have recognized a fellow-disciple of Emerson, but would have mocked him as a well, and would have described as merely a mean, low, calculating Yankee merchant. But he would have continued to echo James' and Dewey's Emersonian appeals to the future to produce an ever-expanding profusion of new sorts of human lives, new kinds of human beings.

I think it is important for an understanding of post-Darwinian intellectual life to grasp the importance of the pragmatists' refusal to accept the correspondence theory of truth: the idea that true beliefs are accurate representations of a pre-existent reality. This refusal is linked to their refusal to believe that non-human reality has an intrinsic character, a character which human beings ought to respect. For notions like "Reality" or "Nature" Nietzsche and James substituted the biologistic notion of the environment. The environment in which human beings live poses problems to them but, unlike a capitalized Reason or a capitalized Nature, we owe it neither respect nor obedience. Our task is to master it, or to adapt ourselves to it, rather than to represent it or correspond to it. The idea that we have a moral duty to correspond to Reality is, for Nietzsche and James, as stultifying as the idea that the whole duty of man is to please God.

The link between Darwinism and pragmatism is clearest if one asks
oneself the question: At what point in biological evolution did organisms stop just coping with reality and start representing it? To pose the riddle is to suggest the answer: maybe they never did start representing it. Maybe the whole idea of mental representation is just an uncashable and misleading metaphor. Maybe this metaphor was inspired by the same need to ally oneself with a powerful non-human authority which made the priests think themselves more truly human than the warriors, and which produced Aristotle's claim that men are more truly human than women. Maybe, now that the French and industrial revolutions have given us a new self-confidence, we can drop the idea of representing reality and substitute the idea of using it.

Abandoning the correspondence theory of truth means no longer insisting that Truth, like Reality, is One and seamless. If a true belief is the sort of belief which surpasses the competition as a rule for successful future action, then there is no need to reconcile all one's beliefs with all one's other beliefs—no need to attempt to see reality steadily and whole. There is no need, for example, to reconcile one's regular attendance at Mass with one's work as an evolutionary biologist. Conflict between beliefs adopted for diverse purposes will only arise when we engage in projects of social cooperation, when we need to agree about what is to be done. So the pursuit of a political utopia becomes disjoined from both religion and science. It has no religious or scientific or philosophical foundations, but only utilitarian and pragmatic ones. A liberal democratic utopia, on the pragmatists' view, is not truer to human nature or the demands of an
ahistorical moral law than a fascist tyranny. But it is much more likely to produce greater human happiness. A perfected society will not live up to a pre-existent standard, but will be an artistic achievement, produced by the same long and difficult process of trial and error as is required by any other creative effort.

In this first portion of my paper, I have tried to show how Darwinism, utilitarianism and pragmatism conspired to exalt plurality over unity--how the dissolution of the traditional theologico-metaphysical world-picture helped fill the European intellectuals with historical optimism. The new social hopes which filled the nineteenth century helped them accomplish this transvaluation of traditional philosophical values, and the resulting philosophical pluralism helped provide a focus for those hopes. At the end of that century, it seemed entirely plausible that the human race, having broken through age-old barriers, was now about to create a global, cosmopolitan, social-democratic pluralist society. This society would not only eliminate traditional inequalities but would leave plenty of room for its members to pursue their individual visions of human perfection.

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I come now to the second part of my paper, in which I want to take up some questions which have begun to burden intellectuals in recent decades.

These questions are among those which trouble Clifford Geertz in his new book. Geertz says that it has become much more apparent
in the last few years that liberalism "is, itself, a cuturally specific phenomenon, born in the West and perfected there." (III, 21). The very universalism to which liberalism is committed and which it promotes, Geertz continues, has brought it into open conflict both with other universalisms

with similar intent, most notably with that set forth by a revenant Islam, and with a large number of alternative versions of the good, the right, and the indubitable, Japanese, Indian, African, Singaporean, to which it looks like just one more attempt to impose Western values on the rest of the world--the continuation of colonialism by other means.

What Geertz says of liberalism is true also of its philosophical partners, utilitarianism and pragmatism. Most of those attracted by those two philosophical doctrines are people who had previously decided that their favorite utopia is the liberal one described in *On Liberty*: a world in which nothing remains sacred save the freedom to lead your life by your own lights, and nothing is forbidden which does not interfere with the freedom of others. If you lose faith in this utopia, you may begin to have doubts about philosophical pluralism.

Although this partnership relation is real and important, it should be clear that neither utilitarianism nor pragmatism is entailed by liberalism. That is why Nietzsche can be as good a pragmatist as James and why Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor can be as good a utilitarian as Mill. On the other hand, liberalism comes close to entailing them.
For although romantic utilitarians do not necessarily want to
disenchant the world, they certainly want to disenchant the past. So
they need to melt much that had seemed to solid into air. The
redefinitions of "right" and "true" offered by Mill and James
respectively are almost indispensable to this melting process. For
any non-utilitarian definition of "right" and any non-pragmatist
definition of "true" will lend aid and comfort to the idea that there
is an authority--for example, the eternal moral law, or the intrinsic
structure of reality--which takes precedence over consensus among free
human beings.

Geertz says that the partisans of liberalism
must reconceive it as a view not from nowhere but from the special
somewhere of (a certain sort of) Western political
experience, a statement...about what we who are the heirs
of that experience think we have learned about how people
with differences can live together amongst one another with
some degree of comity. (III, 23)

That is exactly how Dewey wanted us to conceive of pragmatism: not
as the result of a deeper understanding of the intrinsic nature of
truth or knowledge, but as the view of truth and knowledge one will
be likely to adopt if, as a result of one's own experience with various
socio-political alternatives, one's highest hope is the creation of
the liberal utopia sketched by Mill. Pragmatists are entirely at home
with the idea that political theory should view itself as suggestions
for future action emerging out of recent historical experience, rather
than as a legitimation of the outcome of that experience.

But the skeptics Geertz cites, the people who suspect that liberalism is an attempt to impose the outcome of a specifically European experience on people who have had no share in this experience, are likely to suggest that European confidence in liberalism and its philosophical corollaries is simply confidence in the success of Europe to make the rest of the world submit to its will. How can you Europeans tell, such sceptics ask, whether your devotion to liberalism is a result of its intrinsic merits or simply a result of its association with power—the power of your Europeans and the North Americans to enforce your will on the rest of us?

This line of questioning raises the possibility that yesterday's unbounded faith in liberalism and its philosophical corollaries was a result of a tacit conviction of the inevitability of liberalism's success, a conviction which we have now lost. From the beginning of the colonialist period until the recent past, it seemed obvious to most Europeans, and plausible to many non-Europeans, that nothing could withstand the force of Europe's intellectual example any more than the force of Europe's commercial and military power. Perhaps the transvaluation of traditional philosophical values to which I have referred—the shift from unity to plurality—was simply an attempt by philosophers to climb on an economic and military bandwagon?

A Deweyan response to one of Geertz's post-colonial sceptics would go something like this: Sure, pragmatism and utilitarianism might never have gotten off the ground without the triumphalism which
non-Europeans associate with colonialism and imperialism. But so what?
The question is not whether these philosophical views were the product
of this or that transitory hold on power, but whether anybody has any
better ideas or any better utopias. We pragmatists are not arguing
that modern Europe has any superior insight into any eternal,
ahistorical, realities. We do not claim any superior rationality.
We claim only an experimental success: we have come up with a way of
bringing people into some degree of comity, and of increasing human
happiness, which looks more promising than any other way which has
been proposed so far.

In order to evaluate this response, consider some of the reasons
why Europe no longer looks like the avant-garde of the human race,
reasons why it seems absurdly improbable that we shall ever have a
global liberal utopia. Here are three:

(1) There is no way to have European democratic government without
something like a European standard of living—without the middle class,
and without the well-established institutions of civil society, which
such a standard makes possible. Without these, you cannot have an
electorate sufficiently literate and leisured to take part in the
democratic process. But there are too many people in the world, and
too few natural resources, to make such a standard of living available
to all.

(2) The greedy and selfish kleptocrats who have held political
power in most times and places throughout human history have become,
in recent decades, considerably more sophisticated. The Chinese and
Nigerian generals, and their counterparts around the world, have learned from the failures of twentieth-century totalitarianism to avoid ideology, to be pragmatic, and to lie, cheat and steal in much more suave and sophisticated ways than those used by, for example, the old Communist nomenklaturas. So the end of the Cold War gives no reason for optimism about the progress of democracy, whatever it may have done for the progress of capitalism.

(3) Achieving a liberal utopia on a global scale would require establishing a world federation, exercising a global monopoly of force---the sort of federation you can find described in any scifi utopia set in the twenty-first century. (As Michael Lind has pointed out, the only scifi stories which postulate a continuing plurality of sovereign nation-states are apocalyptic dystopias.) But the likelihood of such a federation being set up is much less than it was in 1945. The continual splitting up of old nation-states, ex-colonies, and ex-federations makes this seem less likely with every passing year. So even if technology could somehow enable us to balance population and resources, and even if we could get somehow get the kleptocrats off the backs of the poor, we would still be out of luck. For sooner or later uniformed idiots will start pressing nuclear buttons, the nation-state and civil society will vanish overnight, and our grandchildren will inhabit scifi dystopias like Road Warrior.

I think these are three very good reasons for believing that neither democratic freedoms nor philosophical pluralism will survive the next century. If I were a wagering Olympian, I would bet my fellow
divinities that pragmatism, utilitarianism and liberalism will, among mortals, be only faint memories in a hundred years. For very few unexpurgated libraries will exist, and very few people will ever have heard of Mill, Nietzsche, James, and Dewey, any more than of free trade unions, a free press, and democratic elections.

None of these reasons why the dreams of nineteenth-century Europe will be irrelevant to the twenty-second century, however, suggest any reason to be suspicious of the superiority of liberalism, pragmatism, or utilitarianism to their various rivals, any more than the collapse of the Roman Empire gave Augustine and his contemporaries a reason to be dubious about the superiority of Christianity to paganism. Nor does contemplating such reasons help us do what Geertz asks us to do, when he calls for the creation of "a new kind of politics", one which does not regard ethnic, religious, racial, linguistic, or regional assertiveness as so much irrationality, archaic and ingenerate, to be suppressed or transcended, a madness decried or a darkness ignored, but, like any other social problem--inequality, say, or the abuse of power--sees it as a reality to be faced, somehow dealt with, modulated, brought to terms. (II, 27)

When I first read this sentence in Geertz' book, I found myself agreeing. But on second thought I realized that I was agreeing with the spirit rather than the letter. I take the spirit of Geertz' remark to be that we should deal with people who exhibit such assertiveness as we should deal with all other potential fellow-citizens of a world
federation: we should take their problems seriously and talk them through. But if one takes Geertz' sentence literally one can properly rejoin that there is no contradiction between regarding something as archaic and ingenerate irrationality and regarding it as a reality to be faced, somehow dealt with, modulated, brought to terms.

I think it important to insist on this absence of contradiction because it is often said that philosophical pluralists like myself must abjure the notion of "irrationality". But this is not so. We can perfectly well use the notion as long as we do so to signify a readiness to ignore the results of past experience, rather than to signify a departure from the commands of an ahistorical authority called Reason.

We have learned quite a lot, in the course of the past two centuries, about how races and religions can live in comity with one another. If we forget these lessons, we can quite reasonably be called irrational. It makes good pragmatic and pluralist sense to say that the nations of the world are being irrational in not creating a World Government to which they can surrender their sovereignty and their nuclear warheads, and to say that Serbian peasants were being irrational in accepting Milosevic's suggestion that they loot and rape neighbors with whom they had been living peacefully for fifty years, just as we say that non-Jews in Munich were being irrational in accepting Hitler's suggestion that they turn and rend their Jewish neighbors.

Insofar as "post-modern" philosophical thinking is identified with a mindless and stupid cultural relativism--with the idea that
any fool thing that calls itself a culture is worthy of respect--then I have no use for such thinking. But I do not see that what I have called "philosophical pluralism" entails any such stupidity. The reason to try persuasion rather than force, to do our best to come to terms with people who strike as archaic and ingenerate, is simply that using force, or mockery, or insult, is likely to decrease human happiness.

We do not need to supplement this wise utilitarian counsel with the idea that every culture has some sort of intrinsic worth. We have learned the futility of trying to assign all cultures and persons places on an hierarchical scale, but this realization does not impugn the obvious fact that there are lots of cultures we should be better off without, just as there are lots of people we should be better off without. To say that there is no such scale, and that we are simply clever animals trying to increase our happiness by continually re-inventing ourselves, has no relativistic consequences. The difference between pluralism and cultural relativism is the difference between pragmatically justified tolerance and mindless irresponsibility.

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So much for my suggestion that the popularity of the meaningless term "post-modernism" is the result of an inability to resist the claims of philosophical pluralism combined with fear that history is about to turn against us. Now I should like to say a concluding word about the unpopularity of the term--about the rhetoric of those who use this
word as a term of abuse.

Many of my fellow philosophers use the term "postmoderist relativism" as it were a pleonasm, and as if utilitarians, pragmatists and philosophical pluralists generally had committed a sort of treason of the clerks. They often suggest that if philosophers had united behind the good old theologico-metaphysical verities— if James and Nietzsche had been strangled in their cradles—the fate of mankind might have been different. Just as Christian fundamentalists tell us that tolerance for homosexuality leads to the collapse of civilization, so those who would have us return to Plato and Kant explain that utilitarianism and pragmatism have weakened our intellectual and moral fibre. The triumph of European democratic ideals, they suggest, would have been much more likely that we philosophical pluralists kept our mouths shut.

One of my reasons for listing three good reasons for thinking that those ideals will not triumph was to suggest that changes in Weltanschauung have little to do with the fate of our species. Neither the ratio of population to resources, nor the power which modern technology has put in the hands of kleptocrats, nor the provincial intransigence of national governments, have anything to do with such changes. Only the archaic and ingenerate belief that an offended non-human power will punish those who do not worship it makes it possible to see a connection between the intellectual shift from unity to plurality and these reasons for historical pessimism. This shift leaves us nothing with which to give comfort to our social hopes, but
that does not mean there is anything wrong with those hopes. The utopian social hope which sprang up in nineteenth century Europe is still the noblest of the human race's imaginative creations.

Richard Rorty

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