

Eating Empty Carbs at the Postmodern Buffet

By

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“Pigs is Pigs,” is a 1937 Warner Brothers cartoon about, what else, a pig named Piggy. Piggy is aptly named because all he ever thinks about is eating. While all of his other siblings are having fun playing together in the yard, Piggy is off by himself daydreaming about his favorite foods—dagwood sandwiches, roast turkey, apple pie, corn on the cob, and fresh watermelon. When his mother puts fresh pies to cool on the window ledge, Piggy sneaks and gobbles them up. When dinner time comes, he runs ahead of everyone else to be the first at the table. And when his mother tells him to wait long enough to say grace, Piggy quickly prays for extra ice cream then sneaks under the table while everyone else has their heads bowed and ties all their spaghetti noodles together. Just as soon as his mother says “Amen,” Piggy slurps up all the noodles at once. His mother warns him that someday indigestion will do him in.

That night, while all his siblings are soundly asleep, Piggy is awake thinking about food—ice cream cones, pies, cakes, hot dogs, and so on. Suddenly he finds himself at the home of a mad scientist who invites him to sit a table piled high with all of his favorite dishes. But just as soon as he sits, the chair turns into a contraption that straps him in place and lowers him into a secret underground laboratory. Another mechanical device pinches his nose to force open his mouth while various machines pour bowls of soup into his throat and shoot dozens of bananas down his esophagus. The mad scientist laughs as other mechanisms force-feed Piggy countless olives, ice cream cones, pies, and a sandwich as big as a tabletop. After all of this, the mad scientist pulls a few levers, pushes a few buttons, and the entire process starts over again.

When it finally ends, Piggy is ten times his size and can barely waddle to the door. Just before he reaches the exit, however, he sees a drumstick he has somehow missed, picks it up, takes a bite, and it explodes like a bomb. Piggy instantly awakens safe in his bed to realize it has all been a bad dream. Just then he hears his mother calling everyone to breakfast. As usual, Piggy rushes downstairs before everyone else and begins stuffing his face. Even after a bad night’s sleep and such a terrible nightmare, Piggy hasn’t learned a thing. Pigs will be pigs.

Like Piggy, I doubt if Americans are done with our addiction to all-you-can-eat buffets either, despite a lot of them being setback or shut down by the pandemic. As food reporter Ronnie Koenig says in a *Today* article, “Shared spoons, salad bar sneeze guards and standing in line next to other hungry customers in order to pile your plate high seems in direct opposition to the safety measures we’ve all adopted surrounding food service.”¹ In fact, one of the bigger restaurant chains that was built entirely on the buffet model, Old Country Buffet, filed for bankruptcy last year. Even so, Lance Trenary, President and CEO of the most successful buffet chain of them all, *Golden Corral*, is confident the buffet will survive COVID-19. “We will forever operate differently as a result,” he says, “but I have no doubt that there is still a place for buffet dining, as evidenced by the enthusiasm and support from our loyal guests.”² As another food expert, Brian Bartels writes, “Excess and America have always played in the same sandbox. From our portion sizes to our wines to our politics, we Americans like things *big*. There’s no better example of our love of excess than

the buffet, that cultural touchstone of culinary decadence that is so archetypally American. When all is said and done, what is more American than the almighty buffet?"³

But I don't want to talk about the buffet industry today. I only mean to point out how much the buffet mindset has become part of our culture since it began, where else, in Las Vegas in the 1940s. It's a mindset that might best be illustrated by the difference between carefully choosing and not having to choose at all. Nor is it a mindset in which one needs to cooperate with, compromise with, or consider the wishes of others. Normally, those planning to go out to eat together must first powwow to determine what kind of food they can all agree upon. If some want Chinese, some want Italian, and others want pizza, there's going to have to be some relational work put in, like compromising, to make sure everyone involved is satisfied with the decision. Then, upon arriving at the restaurant, each person must carefully examine the menu and choose which, among the many choices, is going to be the best choice, always with a bit of dread they might end up wishing they'd chosen something else.

The buffet makes it easy on us. There's no need to compromise or make any hard choices, just go someplace where everyone can get what they like and if you don't like one dish, try another, as much and as often as you wish. This is particularly great for foods that otherwise have to be shared, like pizza or Chinese dishes. Go to a pizza buffet and there's no need to decide who likes and dislikes which toppings, or to share specific Chinese platters because the buffet, like the new hit movie, has everything, everywhere, all at once.

When considering how this buffet mindset has spilled over into our wider culture, it seems to explain a lot about today's society. Today, we act as if we shouldn't have to compromise what we want in order to relate well with others. Why treat each other civilly when we can all simply go to the buffet and have exactly what we want. And when it comes to determining which idea and beliefs we'll choose, there's no need to scrutinize the menu, no need to be informed, no need to read up on our options—just pick whatever truth you want to be true. It's easy at the all-truths-are-equal, all-you-can-believe, everything, everywhere, all at once buffet.

If I were to give this ideological smorgasbord a name, I'd call it The Postmodern Buffet, because it is the same nonsensical mindset that defines postmodernism. In his *The History of Philosophy*, A. C. Grayling says it's based on the kind of thinking that is "fundamentally about, namely, resisting what it sees, or fears, in science."⁴ Postmodernism, which began in the 1950s, is a rejection of the Enlightenment's commitment to reason and empiricism, to logic and science, in favor of relativism. Instead of using language to talk about real and verifiable things, postmodernism rejects the idea that any objective reality or truth exists, believing as a result, that every idea has equal standing and that one's lived experience has as much authority as experience itself. That is to say, one's subjective experience of events is the truth, even more so than objective experience since there is no such thing as objective truth to begin with.

The Enlightenment thinking our nation along with our liberal religion were founded upon, is rooted in the ideas of the earliest Greek philosophers 2,600 years ago that were rediscovered

during the Renaissance that emphasized the importance of empirical reality and objective truth to be ascertained through reason and science, as well as the resulting belief in human nature and human agency. Postmodernism is a rejection of all of this in favor of relative truths and a disbelief in our common humanity. Instead, since there exists no such thing as human nature, truth is relative to every individual, which explains today's shift toward identity-based tribalism, resulting in intolerance, incivility, mistrust, and a new kind of social segregationism.

The problem with such thinking is it presumes that just because it is not possible to know the objective truth with absolute certainty, then there's no such thing as objective truth. It then erroneously infers that everything must be true. Firstly, our inability to be absolutely certain of the nature of reality or of the truth doesn't mean they don't exist, only that we are limited in our powers to perceive them. Secondly, if we could prove there were no such thing as objective truth, it is illogical to conclude everything must be true. Rather, if there is no such thing as truth, we should conclude that nothing is true. That nobody is right. That nobody knows the truth, not that everyone knows the truth no matter what they believe.

It's also difficult to understand, if all truths are true, why there's still so much ideological intolerance in the world and in our society in particular. Why, then, do some consider their truths to be unquestionable and why are they so readily willing to condemn anyone who disagrees with them? Why do they claim those who disagree with them are the intolerant ones when they themselves cannot bear to hear dissenting views?

But logic has no place in our postmodern milieu. Reason is a mistake of the past and has no place in the senseless world of relativism and lived experience. Logic is part of the old oppressors' way of consuming experience: the old way of talking with others to determine the best course and reading the menu to make an educated choice about what might be the best answer. It's much easier just to go to the Postmodern Buffet where choosing is meaningless because you can have it all, whatever you like, whatever you want to be true, no matter how unsubstantial it might be.

And if the situation weren't already bad enough, the Postmodern Buffet just got a lot bigger thanks to the recent advent of social media. Evidence is no longer even a consideration. Just ask yourself what you prefer to believe and you can easily find it expressed on social media. Don't like the democrats? Then check out the Pizzagate tray where you'll find a child sex-trafficking ring run by Hillary Clinton. Dislike the election results, then go to our QAnon platter and eat up its many delicious falsehoods claiming the election was stolen. Still don't want to admit that Global Warming is real, then don't miss the many delicacies on the hoax dessert bar. You can't stop at just one. There's our "it's-a-liberal-conspiracy hoax," our "democrats-made-it-up-to-destroy-our-country hoax," our "scientists-disagree-about-its-cause hoax," and everybody's favorite, "it's-just-cyclic hoax." Then top it all off with a dash of, "Hey-look-it's-snowing-So-much-for-global-warming hoax." And be sure to leave room for some of our delicious alternative facts. Whatever you want to believe, you'll find all you can stomach at the Postmodern Buffet.

Postmodernism's renunciation of facts isn't merely a phenomenon among conservative thinkers. It's probably even worse among progressives because it started in academia, which they dominate, as proven today by the Left's widespread practice of punishing dissenters among its own ranks. "But," as social psychologist Johnathan Haidt says in a recent *Atlantic Article*, "when an institution punishes internal dissent, it shoots darts into its own brain."⁵ In other words, it becomes stupid. Haidt goes on to say, "The problem is that the left controls the commanding heights of the culture; universities, news organizations, Hollywood, art museums, advertising, much of Silicon Valley, and the teachers' unions and teaching colleges that shape K-12 education. And in many of those institutions, dissent *has* been stifled."⁶

And it has become stifled, in large part, because the left has accepted the absurd postmodern rejection of reason and empiricism to fallaciously conclude that all truths are true and just let anyone try disagreeing with us! The weapon used against dissenters, which is why this has become such a problem, is the widespread use of social media which currently has no meaningful safeguards against misinformation or intentional disinformation, which is why we can find anything we want to believe at the Postmodern Buffet. Since social media's arrival little more than a decade ago, "everyone was issued a dart gun," Haidt says, "and many left-leaning institutions began shooting themselves in the brain."⁷ Listen carefully to his salient explanation:

But when the newly virilized social-media platforms gave everyone a dart gun, it was younger progressive activists who did the most shooting, and they aimed a disproportionate number of their darts at [their] older liberal leaders. Confused and fearful, the leaders rarely challenged the activists or their nonliberal narrative in which life at every institution is an eternal battle among identity groups over a zero-sum pie, and the people on top got there by oppressing the people on the bottom. This new narrative is rigidly egalitarian—focused on equality of outcomes, not on rights or opportunities. It is unconcerned with individual rights.⁸

Finally, Haidt says, "The universal charge against people who disagree with this narrative is not 'traitor'; it is 'racist,' 'transphobe,' 'Karen,' or some related scarlet letter marking the perpetrator as one who hates and harms a marginalized group. The punishment that feels right for such crimes is not execution; it is public shaming and social death."⁹ Don't I know it!

This is where social media comes in—as a tool for quickly and easily canceling somebody's voice and holding them forever "accountable" for having disagreed with the new status quo by blacklisting them and destroying both their reputations and careers. This is so, not because these neoliberals truly believe all truths are equal, which they obviously don't, but because they are obsessed with what they call the "lived-experiences" of marginalized identity groups. Anything anyone from such a group says must be accepted as true by everyone without question, or else. So even at the Postmodern Buffet some truths are considered tastier than others.

Whether we are on the Left or the Right, our society has reached an unprecedented period of what I call *imbecivility*, or that which Johnathan Haidt simple calls stupidity. We can't get along with each other because we disagree about things that are absurd to begin with. That's imbecivility.

While I agree that it is not possible for any of us to know objective truth with absolute certainty, it is illogical to conclude from this that there is no such thing as objective truth. I can only conclude that it is not possible for me to know anything for sure, which is why I am a liberal to begin with, because I approach life groping in the darkness through liberalism's tools of reason and empiricism, seeking to grasp some data that can provide reasonable hints upon which to base my understanding of reality. This is also why another tenant of liberalism is tolerance. We should not hate, or attack, or destroy those we disagree with or who disagree with us because nobody can wholly claim to know the truth. Freedom, reason, and tolerance—that's liberalism and nothing less. Hence, by definition, those who have taken over many of our liberal institutions by attacking dissenters, cannot be considered liberals.

As philosopher David Chalmers puts it in his new book, *Reality+*, "We live in an age in which truth and reality have been under attack. We're sometimes said to be in an era of post-truth politics in which truth is irrelevant. It's common to hear that there is no absolute truth and no objective reality. Some people think that reality is all in the mind, so that what's real is entirely up to us."¹⁰ But Chalmers disputes this view, saying, "reality exists, independently of us. The truth matters. There are truths about reality, and we can try to find them. Even in age of multiple realities, I still believe in objective reality."¹¹

So next time you're trying to decide which truths you want to devour, try skipping the Postmodern Buffet. Instead, talk it over with some friends, preferably your smarter friends. And when you do decide on a place, take plenty of time to get a good look at the menu so you can make a sound decision about which truths you will consume.

¹ <https://www.today.com/food/are-buffets-thing-past-reimagining-all-you-can-eat-post-t216143>

² Ibid.

³ <https://vinepair.com/articles/the-buffet-a-cultural-history-of-an-american-institution/>

⁴ Grayling, A.C., *The History of Philosophy*, Penguin Pressy, New York, NY, 2019. p. 511

⁵ Haidt, Jonathan, "After Babel: How Social Media Dissolved the Mortar of Society and Made America Stupid," *Atlantic*, May 2022, p. 60.

⁶ Ibid., p. 61.

⁷ Ibid., p. 61f.

⁸ Ibid., p. 62.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Chalmers, David J., *Reality+: Virtual Worlds and the Problem of Philosophy*, W.W. Norton and Company, New York, NY, 2022, p. xxiii.

¹¹ Ibid., p. xxiv.