

Factishism

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Against positivism, which halts at phenomena [and says] ‘there are only facts’, I would say: no, facts is precisely what there is not, only interpretations.

(F. Nietzsche, *Nachlaß*, Summer 1886-Fall 1887 – 7 [60])

Man constructs reality by formulating names and terms. According to Friedrich Nietzsche, this is the lie that underpins all knowledge. We place ourselves outside of reality, but in the centre of the world. A world we create in our image...

Nietzsche does not criticise our thinking in simplifying the world, but our claim that this simplification is the real image of the world.

We reflect what we know about the world into what we perceive as facts. And we reflect what we perceive as facts into what we know about the world. Any knowledge is *a priori* subjective projection – we’re running in circles inside a closed trap...

Now, as Narcissus did, a mirror image can be objectified, seen as an entity in its own right and not as the mere projection of the subject it really is.

The way in which we perceive ‘facts’ is equally narcissistic. But there’s more: once a ‘fact’ is placed in the object-realm, it must reclaim its just place in the subject-realm for us to derive from it what we know about the world. However, given the narcissistic distortion of reality by which it was objectified, it cannot return in its true nature; it *has* to return in the form of a fetish... We cannot perceive something as real, if it is not perceived as a fact, and with that, to us a fact is attributed with magical powers, powers to shape reality... Our preoccupation with facts in a feeble attempt to make sense of it all, is mere fetishism...

Along those lines, but taking it one step further, it is Bruno Latour’s assertion that objectivity and subjectivity are modern myths, creating all kinds of illusory dichotomies from dualistic terms. In order to repeal these, Latour proposes the use of ‘blended notions’.

In his volume of essays *Pandora’s Hope*, Latour introduces the neologism ‘factish’ as a combination of ‘fact’ and ‘fetish’. Both terms are etymologically related – originating from the Latin *factus* (past participle of *facere*, to make) – yet, they connote opposite meanings: one object-related and one subject-related...

Fetishism is an accusation made by a denunciator; it implies that believers have simply projected onto a meaningless object their own beliefs and desires. Factishes, in contrast, are types of action that do not fall into the comminatory choice between fact and belief. The neologism is a combination of facts and fetishes and makes it obvious that the two have a common element of fabrication. Instead of opposing facts to fetishes, and instead of denouncing facts as fetishes, it is intended to take seriously the role of actors in all types of activities and thus to do away with the notion of belief.

(B. Latour, *Pandora’s Hope: Essays on the Reality of Science Studies* (1999) – Glossary of concepts)

Latour’s concept of ‘factishism’ is an attempt to convert our thinking away from the duality: facts are neither real, nor constructed... they are both!