

Postmodern Theology

I might have written an account of how even atheists like myself are impressed, improved and morally instructed by [reading] *Pilgrim's Progress*.

— RICHARD RORTY

1.6.1 INTRODUCTION

Atheism is the theological belief that there is no God, no supernatural Creator, no Divine moral lawgiver, and no ultimate Judge of man's actions. It is the theological backbone of not only Secular Humanism and Marxism, but it is also the predominant theological view of classical Postmodernism.

Although more subtle in some ways than their fellow atheists, Postmodernists have their theological underpinnings in atheism. Kevin J. Vanhoozer says, "Postmodernists agree with Nietzsche that 'God'—which is to say, the supreme being of classical theism—has become unbelievable, as have the autonomous self and the meaning of history."

1.6.2 MARXIST INFLUENCE

According to Glen Ward, the vast majority of mainstream Postmodernists emerged from the Marxist atheistic tradition. Michel Foucault, for example, was at one time a member of the French Communist Party and one other Maoist organization. Jean Baudrillard's writings were "within a loosely Marxist framework," thinking it was his responsibility to "bring Marx up to date." Pierre Macherey was "a Marxist critic . . . concerned with how texts act to reproduce the values of capitalism." A sympathetic critic defined Postmodernism as Marxism-lite dressed in a French tuxedo, sippin' French wine in a French café on the campus of the *College Internationale de Philosophie*. A less sympathetic critic referred to Postmodernism as linguistic sophistry seeking to save Marxism's irrelevant posterior.

During its early years Marxism promised a this-world salvation for the enlightened irreligious. However, with the passage of time and countless body bags, the idea of a Marxist utopia was eventually revealed for what it was—a mirage. As a result, Postmodernism was birthed as a "wayward stepchild of Marxism, and in a sense a generation's realization that it is orphaned."

Thus, Postmodernism became a reaction against Marxist dogma of violent revolutions, Marxist dialectical logic, and the Marxist worldview itself. On the other hand, Postmodernism is a continuation of other Marxist ideas, namely atheism, socialism, punctuated evolution, and the socially constructed self, among others.

1.6.3 NIETZSCHE'S INFLUENCE

In the pre-modern era God, revelation, and the clergy were the ultimate sources for truth about reality. However, in the modern era science and reason became the key resources for truth about reality. Well into the age of modernism, **Friedrich Nietzsche** stated the obvious from a modernist perspective: "God is dead; we have killed him." By this statement Nietzsche did not mean to imply

that humanity killed God or that God was once alive and had died. Rather Nietzsche meant that *belief in God* was no longer necessary.

Foucault later checked the vital signs of modernity and discovered a corpse as cold as Nietzsche's God. He discovered that the modernist era had given way to another—Postmodernism. With this coming new era both Nietzsche and Foucault predicted a period of violence, death, destruction, and ultimately the end of humanity itself. Nietzsche put it down as follows:

Have you not heard of that madman who lit a lantern in the bright morning hours, ran to the market place, and cried incessantly: "I seek God! I seek God!"—

As many of those who did not believe in God were standing around just then, he provoked much laughter. Has he got lost? asked one. Did he lose his way like a child? asked another. Or is he hiding? Is he afraid of us? Has he gone on a voyage? emigrated?—Thus they yelled and laughed.

The madman jumped into their midst and pierced them with his eyes.

"Whither is God?" he cried; "I will tell you. *We have killed him*—you and I. All of us are his murderers. But how did we do this? How could we drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What were we doing when we unchained this earth from its sun? Whither is it moving now? Whither are we moving? Away from all suns? Are we not plunging continually? Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there still any up or down? Are we not straying, as through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space? Has it not become colder? Is not night continually closing in on us? Do we not need to light lanterns in the morning? Do we hear nothing as yet of the noise of the gravediggers who are burying God? Do we smell nothing as yet of the divine decomposition? Gods, too, decompose. God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him.

"How shall we comfort ourselves, the murderers of all murderers? What was holiest and mightiest of all that the world has yet owned has bled to death under our knives: who will wipe this blood off us? What water is there for us to clean ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we have to invent? Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? Must we ourselves not become gods simply to appear worthy of it? There has never been a greater deed; and whoever is born after us—for the sake of this deed he will belong to a higher history than all history hitherto."

Here the madman fell silent and looked again at his listeners; and they, too, were silent and stared at him in astonishment. At last he threw his lantern on the ground, and it broke into pieces and went out. "I have come too early," he said then; "my time is not yet. This tremendous event is still on its way, still wandering; it has not yet reached the ears of men. Lightning and thunder require time; the light of the stars requires time; deeds, though done, still require time to be seen and heard. This deed is still more distant from them than most distant stars—and yet they have done it themselves.

It has been related further that on the same day the madman forced his way into several churches and there struck up his *requiem aeternam deo*. Led out and called to account, he is said always to have replied nothing but: "What after all are these churches now if they are not the tombs and sepulchers of God?"

Foucault elaborates: ". . . Nietzsche indicated the turning-point from a long way off; it is not so much the absence or the death of God that is affirmed as the end of Man . . . it becomes apparent, then, that the death of God and the last man are engaged in a contest with more than one round: is it not the last man who announces that he has killed God, thus situating his language, his thought, his laughter in the space of that already dead God, yet positing himself also as he who has killed God

and whose existence includes the freedom and the decision of that murder? Thus, the last man is at the same time older and yet younger than the death of God; since he has killed God, it is he himself who must answer for his own finitude; but since it is in the death of God that he speaks, thinks, and exists, his murder itself is doomed to die; new gods, the same gods, are already swelling the future Ocean; Man will disappear.”

Both Nietzsche and Foucault agree that after humanity kills God, they sign their own death certificate. A worldview perspective reveals how theological beliefs have implications for other areas of life. Nietzsche and Foucault understand the connection.

1.6.4 ATHEISM . . . POSTMODERN STYLE

The classical Postmodern theological spectrum stretches from militant atheism to village atheist. All the major Postmodern writers were atheists, including Foucault, Derrida, Lyotard, Bataille, Barthes, Baudrillard, Macherey, Deleuze, Guattari, and Lacan.

Charlotte Allen noted that Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, “and their [followers] . . . were all militant atheists, with all the intolerance and totalitarian tendencies of that breed.”

Yet at times Derrida himself was more cryptic about his atheism. Speaking before a convention of the American Academy of Religion in 2002, Derrida commented, “I rightly pass for an atheist.” However, when asked why he would not say more plainly ‘I am an atheist,’ he replied, “Maybe I’m not an atheist.” How can Derrida claim to be and not be an atheist? Both the existence or nonexistence of God requires a universal statement about reality, but Derrida is unwilling to make such an absolute claim. In this regard Derrida’s theology is consistent with his Postmodern inclination for ambiguity.

Likewise, Richard Rorty at one time admitted he was an atheist, but in a subsequent work, *The Future of Religion*, he says he now agrees with Gianni Vattimo that “atheism (objective evidence for the nonexistence of God) is just as untenable as theism (objective evidence for the existence of God).” Thus, Rorty insists that atheism, too, must be abandoned in favor of something he labels “anti-clericalism.” Ecclesiastical institutions are dangerous, but not necessarily the local congregation of believers. “Religion,” he says, “is unobjectionable as long as it is privatized.”

1.6.5 DECONSTRUCTION AND “THE DEATH OF GOD” THEOLOGIANS

If God is dead, the belief that there is no ultimate reality or eternal truth becomes a philosophical necessity. A firm believer in this, Derrida concluded further that words and sentences have no inherent meaning. He insisted that human beings construct reality through their use of language. In other words, as you read this page, you will construct your own meaning shaped by your culture and life experiences. The author’s meaning is thus “deconstructed” or altered by the reader. In other words, the author’s meaning becomes captive to the reader. As Ward says, “Deconstruction is a [literary] method of reading which effectively turns texts against themselves.”

For example, according to Derrida’s theory of deconstruction, the Bible is merely a book written by men who were locked in their own culture, experiences, and language. Thus, the Biblical authors were writing about their own subjective experiences, not communicating objective or eternal truths about God and humanity. Therefore, when someone reads the Bible today, he or she brings a personal interpretive grid to the text. The theory of deconstruction can thus be used to explain how some cultures can read the Bible and proceed to slaughter another race, while other cultures reading the same Bible build hospitals, schools, orphanages, and homeless shelters.

Derrida's theory of deconstruction influenced a group of theologians in 1960s England. Bishop John A.T. Robinson in his book *Honest to God* sought to explain what it meant to be a Christian in the Postmodern world. This group became known as the "Death of God" theologians. According to Graham Ward, these theologians saw "the potential of [Derrida's] deconstruction for furthering their project of announcing the end of theology [the death of God]."

The "death of God" theologians fastened onto Derrida's idea that words refer only to other words in a textual setting and cannot be used to describe external realities such as God. They therefore claimed that God is not the Supreme Being who is literally "up there" in heaven somewhere, but instead we should think of God as being "out there" in a spiritual sense. God is "there" when we love another person, and this becomes the main Christian message. In this sense, the traditional concept of God ruling over His Creation is lifeless.

Alister McGrath in *The Twilight of Atheism* speaks of the relationship between Postmodernism, atheism, and deconstruction. He says, "Many Postmodern writers are, after all, atheist (at least in the sense of not actively believing in God). The very idea of deconstruction seems to suggest that the idea of God ought to be eliminated from Western culture as a power play on the part of churches and others with vested interests in its survival."

Derrida also supposed that the Western powers, because of their belief in the existence of God, went off the edge toward violence. However, this notion is far off base. The three "isms" of the 20th century responsible for the slaughter of tens of millions (Communism, Nazism, and Fascism) were not exactly bastions of theism and Christianity. As a matter of fact, all three were grounded in atheism, evolution, and socialism—the very stuff of Postmodernism.

1.6.6 RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

The Postmodern idea that religious beliefs are private preferences has filtered down from the academy to the "unenlightened" commoner, many of whom now embrace pluralism.

Religious pluralism is the belief that one must be tolerant of all religious beliefs because no one religion can be true. This notion agrees with the defining tenets of the Postmodern mood—skepticism of absolute truth, skepticism of a discernable foundation for knowledge, and, in the end, skepticism of all metanarratives (any overarching story that defines reality). As such, many of those immersed in the present Postmodern culture deny religious truth claims.

This trend can be seen in how our present society often thinks about religious claims in general. In the pre-modern and modern eras, religious claims were judged to be either true or false. For example, either there is a God or there is not. Either Jesus is Savior or He is not. Either miracles happen or they do not.

However, in our Postmodern climate where truth is denied, religious claims are based on *preference* rather than on objective standards. For example, either you prefer the notion of the existence of God or you do not. Either you like the idea of Jesus being Savior or you do not. Either miracles appeal to you or they do not. This attitude accommodates *all* religious preferences.

A problem arises when certain religions claim to go beyond personal preferences and convey objective truth, such as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. But making exclusive truth claims runs counter to the Postmodern condition. For that reason, the only religions *not* tolerated are Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

1.6.7 POST-CONSERVATIVE CHRISTIANS

Another theological trend is that of Postmodern Christianity or post-conservatism, or the **emergent church**. A small yet influential group of Christian thinkers make up the leadership of this

group—Stanley Grenz, Nancy Murphey, Roger Olson, Robert Webber, James K. A. Smith, Merold Westphal, and **Brian McLaren**. These “Postmodern” thinkers should not be identified with such atheistic thinkers as Nietzsche, Derrida, Foucault, Lyotard, or Rorty. McLaren makes it clear that although he and his followers accept the term “Postmodern,” they are not “nihilistic, relativistic, anti-Christian, and otherwise slimy and bad.” Most in this camp believe the term best applies to their disposition rather than their dogma.

Although the movement is young, a number of common characteristics are emerging: (1) a critique of the negative aspects of modernism; (2) a strong emphasis on community; (3) a strong emphasis on putting one’s faith into action; and (4) a reminder that not all truth is propositional—e.g. the *story* of “the good Samaritan” expresses the same truth that is found within the *proposition* “love your neighbor.”

On the other hand, several troubling traits are also emerging: (1) a denial of the Bible’s inerrancy; (2) a skepticism of foundational knowledge; and (3) an orthodoxy that is perhaps *too* generous. Thus, although they claim to be evangelical, the jury of orthodoxy is still in deliberations.

Myron B. Penner contends that culturally and philosophically the West is “in the throes of Postmodernity.” His suggestion: “Christians must come to terms with and work through the Postmodern turn and its implications for faith, not ignore or retreat from it. Above all, Christians must persevere in our faith through hope and love.” Penner warns Christians flirting with Postmodernism to be careful not to get caught up in the subjectivity of language to the point where words become emptied of all truth.

1.6.8 CONCLUSION

We recognize that some individuals become atheists because they think Darwin solved the question of life’s ultimate origins. Others become atheists because they look upon God’s moral order as “too restrictive.” Still others believe because they agree with Freud that, “God was a projection. When children have problems, they run to their father for protection. When adults have problems, they project their earthly father into the skies, and they run to this entity for comfort.” Some look at all the evil in the world and decide that no loving God could allow such a situation. In the end, however, Postmodernists offer no new rationale for defending their brand of atheism. Our critique of atheism has been presented in other sections of this work, so it will not be repeated here.

In response to religious pluralism, we contend that the problem with this system in particular is the problem with Postmodernism in general—namely that neither our perspectives nor our preferences can dictate reality. Real people may end up in a literal Hell regardless of whether or not they prefer the doctrine of eternal punishment. In the end, *reality is what it is* whether one prefers that reality or not. For example, many may not prefer a number of Christianity’s tenets—creation, fall, salvation, judgment, abstinence, sobriety, etc. However, our preferences about Christianity or even reality itself cannot change the true nature of reality.

The Bible, of course, has a descriptive term for a person who says in his or her heart there is no God (Psalm 14:1). We will explore in later chapters the consequences of atheism as lived out in the areas of ethics, psychology, sociology, and each of the other disciplines. In these chapters we will find that those who embrace this theology have followed a foolish path indeed.

In the final analysis, atheism is a belief system of the intellectual elite (“the people of fashion”) because only they possess enough faith to believe in it. The common, everyday working man cannot believe that everything in the universe is a result of random chance. As Mary Midgley says, “It may simply not be within our capacity—except of course by just avoiding thought—to think of [the universe] as having no sort of purpose or direction whatever.”

Postmodern Philosophy

We . . . [should] give up the correspondence theory of truth, and start treating moral and scientific beliefs as tools for achieving greater human happiness, rather than as representations of the intrinsic nature of reality.

— RICHARD

RORTY

2.6.1 INTRODUCTION

The philosophical ideas of Postmodernism divide modern-day academia. Today's college students will find Postmodernism ruling the day in their humanities and social studies courses, but will also find Modernism still prevalent in their science, engineering, and mathematics courses. As well, there is little acceptance of the Postmodern approach to knowledge and truth in America's philosophy departments. The Postmodern notion that truth is community-oriented likewise appeals to few Christian theologians.

While there is no single cohesive Postmodern philosophy (rather, there are several), a few consistent themes emerge from each mainstream Postmodern writer.

2.6.2 SUBJECTIVE TRUTH

One of these themes is a denial of universal, objective truth. This is clearly declared in **Jean-Francois Lyotard's** famous statement "incredulity towards metanarrative." A metanarrative refers to a unifying story that seeks to explain how the world is—in other words a metanarrative is a worldview. Lyotard suggests that we should be skeptical of such broad explanations. For example, the statement "God so loved the world" is nonsensical to Postmodernists for two reasons: (1) they deny the existence of God, and (2) statements reflecting the whole world (metanarratives) are impossible.

For Postmodernists, since there is no universal Truth (capital "T"), there are only "truths" (small "t") that are particular to a society or group of people and limited to individual perception. Written or verbal statements can reflect only a particular localized culture or individual point of view. A well-worn catchphrase we hear in this regard is, "That may be true for you, but not for me."

Yet, by making the universal statement that there are no meta-narratives, Postmodernists have put themselves in the position of creating a metanarrative. Their story that explains the world is that there are no explanations of the world, only local stories told by various cultures. For this reason, we refer to Postmodernism as the anti-worldview worldview.

2.6.3 LANGUAGE AND DECONSTRUCTION

Regarding literature, Postmodernists are highly concerned with the language of written texts. The term defining the major literary methodology of Postmodernists is **deconstruction**. Associated with the work of the French philosopher **Jacques Derrida**, deconstruction involves reading a text to

ferret out its hidden or multiple meanings (polysemy). In this way, a reader's interpretation of the text becomes more important than the text itself. Also significant is the subjectivity of the reader in determining what the author intended. For example, a reader may feel that a particular text really means an author is racist, even though the written text makes it clear that the author deplors racism.

In 1968, Roland Barthes wrote a short essay entitled "The Death of the Author." In this essay he argued that the *origin* of the text is not the important thing, rather it is the *destination*—the reader. By allowing the reader to invent new meanings, the text is freed from the tyranny of the author's single intended meaning.

For example, there is no reason to assume "that a Shakespearean play means exactly the same thing today as it did when first performed." Each author (or artist) is the product of his or her own cultural setting and uses language to fit his or her condition. Thus, Postmodern literary criticism claims that words never describe the objective world but only refer to other words. Therefore, no matter how a writer constructs a sentence, it can never tell us about the real world, but only about the world as understood by the reader. This concept is summed up in the phrase, "That's just *your* interpretation."

2.6.4 ANTI-REALISM AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF REALITY

This concept of deconstruction is taken far beyond the area of literature. Just as you, the reader, are creating the meaning of this text, you also construct the world according to your culture and experiences. In other words, there is no "real world" out there—only six billion constructions of the world, a belief known as **anti-realism**.

Traditionally, Truth (with a capital "T") was understood as the relationship between the real, objective world and statements that correspond to the real world. This view is called the **correspondence theory of truth**. However, Postmodernists claim this kind of Truth is impossible to achieve. There is no universal "Truth," only personal, subjective truths that exist only in a particular situation or cultural surrounding. Thus, according to the postmodernist paradigm of anti-realism, there is no real world to which truth can correspond. Rather, our words correspond only to other words and, in the end, create our understanding of reality. If words signify only other words, then words can never be used in the pursuit of Truth.

A classic example of the concept that words do not refer to reality is found in Foucault's essay entitled, "This Is Not a Pipe." In this essay, he analyzes a 1966 painting by Magritte that shows a picture of a pipe on a blackboard with the written phrase "This is not a pipe." Above the blackboard is an abstraction of a pipe hanging in the air. Foucault insists that none of these is a pipe, but merely a text that simulates a pipe.

The primary idea behind this "word play" is the Postmodern insistence that all human beings are conditioned by their culture and language—their situation in life—and that no one is able to break through his or her situation to engage a universe with objectively true statements of fact. 'Water wets' is true for only a small community of individuals locked in their own language and culture. In addition, it is true only as long as this community agrees upon this particular usage. In fact, the community determines what is truth through the words it chooses to use.

Richard Rorty has said that truth for him is whatever his community of scholars allows him to get away with. If Rorty says the moon is made of green cheese and his community does not disagree with him, then for him the moon is made of green cheese. Again, reality is not what objectively exists; reality is produced by our agreement of what it is. We do not discover true facts about the real world—we create it.

French cultural theorist Jean Baudrillard took this concept to its logical conclusion. In 1991 he claimed that the Gulf War was not real, but merely simulated for CNN television. The truth that real people were killed did not seem to enter the equation. In actuality, not all Postmodernists take the concept of language and reality to Baudrillard's extreme. Yet, as Glenn Ward notes, this piece has been used “. . . to discredit not only Baudrillard, but Postmodernism's abandonment of truth and evaluation.”

2.6.5 RORTY AND HIS CONVERSATIONS

Rorty also thinks we need to abandon the search for objective truth and instead concentrate on areas where we can all agree. He refers to this quest as “hermeneutic conversation.” Rorty invites his opponents to dialogue with him to see if they can reach agreement, or at least a fruitful disagreement. He says that the “hope of agreement is never lost as long as the conversation lasts.”

But does truth result from such a conversation? Not really. Rorty's insistence on give and take and final agreement only sets the stage for another round of conversations where give and take results in further agreement or disagreement. Truth is never the result of continuing conversation, because the conversation will never be finished.

For Rorty, this use of language and dialogue is “edifying philosophy”—a chance to create some type of reality with the realization that we can never discover true or objective reality outside the boundaries of language, culture, and locality. Since there is no objective, universal Truth, Rorty suggests that perhaps we can reach some type of agreeable truth (small “t”) in order to get along with others.

2.6.6 SUMMARY OF POSTMODERN PHILOSOPHY

Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Research Professor of Systematic Theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, is a shrewd observer of the Postmodern scene and a somewhat sympathetic critic. In addition, he understands the important role Nietzsche played in expressing the foundational ideas for Postmodernism. He writes, “Nietzsche, the patron saint of postmodernity, prophesied accurately: if God is dead, then it's interpretation ‘all the way down.’. . . [O]ne word only points to another word and never to reality itself. No one interpretation can ever be regarded as final. As in interpretation, so in life: everything becomes undecidable.”

Vanhoozer points us to the late C. S. Lewis, who foresaw the shift toward Postmodernist thinking. Lewis' term for this movement is “bulverism” after its imaginary inventor Ezekiel Bulver. Vanhoozer explains: “Lewis imagines the moment that bulverism was born, when five-year-old Ezekiel heard his mother say to his father, ‘Oh, you say that because you are a man.’ Bulver intuitively grasped the stunning implication: arguments need not be refuted, only situated. One rebuts a thought simply by calling attention to the genealogy or location of its thinker.” Probably nothing in Postmodernism today would surprise Lewis.

Vanhoozer offers a concise summary of Postmodern philosophy:

- a) The mark of the Postmodern condition of knowledge is a move away from the authority of universal science toward narratives of local knowledge.
- b) Postmodernists reject the notion of universal rationality; reason is always situated within particular narratives, traditions, institutions, and practices.
- c) Postmodernists reject unifying, totalizing, universal schemes in favor of new emphases on difference, plurality, fragmentation, and complexity.

- d) Postmodernists reject the notion that the person is an autonomous individual with a rational consciousness that transcends his or her particular place in culture, language, history, and gendered body.
- e) Postmodernists agree with Nietzsche that “God” (that is to say, the supreme being of classical theism) has become unbelievable, as have the autonomous self and the meaning of history.
- f) What we know about things is linguistically, culturally, and socially constructed.
- g) Language stands for the socially constructed order within which we think and move and have our being.

2.6.7 SUBJECTIVE TRUTH, DECONSTRUCTION, AND ANTI-REALISM

Postmodernists have difficulty living with their view of reality. They claim that “reality” is constructed by language. On one level we can agree that the statement “The train is coming” may convey a multitude of interpretations to different people. To some it may even simulate a train. But we contend that if people fail to get off the tracks, the result of their interpretation could prove fatal. There are indeed objective, non-verbal referents to words and texts. Real life, however, is not open to infinite interpretations. At any particular moment in time, either a train is coming down the track or a train is not coming down the track. This real-world fact is not a matter of our personal interpretation. Regardless of the word games Postmodernists play there is a reality. Postmodernists have a hard time escaping the correspondence theory of truth.

Consider also the Postmodern phrase, “That’s just *your* interpretation.” As D. A. Carson points out, this view is problematic. Carson says he has never met a deconstructionist who would be pleased if a reviewer misinterpreted his work. He notes, “. . . in practice deconstructionists implicitly link their own texts with their own intentions.” In other words, deconstructionists believe in authorial intent when they are the authors, but deny authorial intent when it comes to works by anyone else.

Likewise, we recognize a dilemma with the well-worn Postmodern slogan, “That may be true for you, but not for me.” If the person making that statement means that it applies only to him, than who cares what he says—he is only talking to himself. On the other hand, if the person means to apply his statement also to *you*, then you can properly respond, “I get the impression that you think I should believe what you just said. If that is the case, why are you trying to impose your concept of what is true on me?” Either way, the Postmodernist has made a statement he cannot live with himself. It is a position that is self-defeating and ultimately absurd. If you try to apply the Postmodernist view of truth in day-to-day life, the result is a total breakdown of your ability to communicate.

Another serious problem arises from a Postmodern philosophy of language: if each community determines what is true through its use of language, which community gets to decide between rival communities when it comes to conflicting ideas? Take for example such disputed ideas as suttee (the Hindu practice of burning widows on their deceased husband’s pyre), exterminating the Jewish race, or abolishing private ownership of property. Since no community can claim to be “right” on these or other issues, the result is an increased competition for which group will dominate the others. We are witnessing this kind of escalation between warring factions in many areas of society, from the college campus to the political arena to the international scene.

Elaborating on this problem is Jurgen Habermas, a German philosopher speaking from a Secular Humanist point of view. Ward explains: “Habermas sees Postmodernism’s apparent embrace of irrationality as morally bankrupt and believes, contrary to Lyotard, that some sort of universally

agreed-upon framework is both possible and necessary in order to ensure that freedom and justice are achieved. Habermas disputes the claims of some Postmodern thinkers that human identity is unstable, fragmented, or ‘in process:’ for him we all, deep down, share eternal human needs and desires. The failure of the Postmodernists is that they refuse to propose a route towards the fulfillment of these.”

Paul Kurtz, in *Humanist Manifesto 2000*, agrees with Habermas and says that Postmodernism—“a philosophical-literary movement”—is nihilistic (the view that nothing can be known or communicated). In contrast to the idea that objective truth is unknowable, Kurtz declares that science offers “reasonably objective standards for judging its truth claims.” He says, “Science has become a universal language, speaking to all men and women no matter what their cultural backgrounds.”

Kurtz fails, however, to acknowledge Christianity’s role in the foundation and development of modern science. Also, while Kurtz is correct in his statement that scientific knowledge can lead to Truth concerning the physical world, the Biblical Christian philosophy of knowledge also emphasizes revealed truth as a means for understanding other Truths, including our relationship to God.

Yet far more significant than these criticisms is the negative consequences of a Postmodern approach to language. For a telling example, look at the results of applying deconstruction to law revealed by the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* case. In handing down their decision, the majority of the Supreme Court justices chose to look at the Constitution as a “living document”—that is, open to many interpretations (polysemy). As a result, they invented new meanings from the original text—meanings that were not openly stated—and came up with a novel interpretation regarding a woman’s reproductive rights that has apparently gone unnoticed for almost 200 years. One consequence of that reinterpretation is that since 1973 over forty million unborn children have been murdered at the request of their mothers.

Postmodernists are correct about one thing—interpretation is important. Confucius is quoted as saying, “When words lose their meanings, people lose their freedom.” However, it is worse than that. In reality, when words lose their meaning, people not only lose their freedom, but their lives as well.

2.6.8 CONCLUSION

Christian students need to understand that according to the Christian worldview “Truth” exists. Nearly everything about Christianity is *universal* in scope and application. God created the whole universe, including men and women. Sin is a *universal* condition affecting every human being. God loved the *whole world*, including every human being. Christ died for the sins of the *whole world*, not just one or two particular communities. Christians are to love God with all their heart and mind and their fellow human beings around the *world*.

Most importantly, God chose to communicate the Truth about Himself and His world by words contained in the Scriptures and the language of the heavens (Psalm 19). God’s words do not depend upon a reader’s interpretation. Instead, the reader is to interpret the Bible according to God’s intention. The Apostle Peter is clear when he writes, “Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:19–21).

To correctly understand the meaning of any text of Scripture, we should heed Paul’s advice to Timothy: “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.” (2 Timothy 2:15) By acknowledging

that God has communicated in language Truth about the real world, and by diligently studying the Bible, you can know the Truth that sets you free (John 8:32).

Postmodern Ethics

I suggest that the novelty of the postmodern approach to ethics consists first and foremost in . . . the rejection of the typically modern ways of going about its moral problems (that is . . . the philosophical search for absolutes, universals and foundations in theory). —

ZYGMUNT BAUMAN

[U]niversal moral principles must be eradicated and reverence for individual and cultural uniqueness inculcated. — ADAM PHILLIPS

3.6.1 INTRODUCTION

Postmodern ethics is not based on universal or unchanging principles. Christians and Muslims embrace ethical codes of moral absolutes based on God's character or moral decree; Secular Humanists, Marxists, and Postmodernists ground their ethical systems in atheism, naturalism, and evolution. Despite springing from the same roots, however, Postmodern ethics differ significantly from Secular Humanist and Marxist ethics.

From a worldview perspective, ethics is the logical outgrowth of a prior commitment to a particular theology. Richard Rorty makes this connection in his work *Achieving Our Country*, where he denigrates the existence of God and God's place in the moral scheme of the universe. To illustrate this perspective, Rorty calls upon the poetry of Walt Whitman, who expresses his view of God in the following lines: "And I call to mankind, Be not curious about God. For I who am curious about each am not curious about God." Embracing Whitman's idea, Rorty states: "Whitman thought there was no need to be curious about God because there is no standard, not even a divine one, against which the decisions of a free people can be measured. Americans, [Whitman] hoped, would spend the energy that past human societies had spent on discovering God's desires on discovering one another's desires."

Rorty insists that for both Whitman and John Dewey, there was "no room for obedience to a nonhuman authority [i.e., God]." In fact, creating the new conception of what it means to be human was "a matter of forgetting about eternity." Rorty and his fellow Postmodernists construct the ethical portion of their worldview from this foundation of atheism.

3.6.2 CULTURAL MORAL RELATIVISM

After denying the existence of God, Rorty moves on to deny the existence of a universal moral reality "to which our moral judgments might hope to correspond, as our physical science supposedly corresponds to physical reality." At this stage, we might ask, *If there is no objective moral reality, why concern ourselves with ethical issues?* While this seems a reasonable next step,

Postmodernists are not comfortable with abandoning ethics completely and instead are driven to search within their worldview for a standard of right and wrong.

Vanhoozer reveals how Postmodernist Jean-François Lyotard “acknowledges that the central issue of Postmodernity is the possibility of ethics, that is, right action.” The next question becomes, *How is right action determined?* Vanhoozer explains, “Lyotard, for his part, is content to live with ‘little narratives.’”

If philosophical truth (what we can know about reality) resides in the local community, it follows that moral truth (how we should behave) resides in the same community. This is what Lyotard means when he says he is content to live with “little narratives.” Since there is no “grand narrative” telling us what is real and how to behave, each community develops its own “little narratives” to fulfill those needs. This is Lyotard’s way of expressing what is called **cultural relativism**.

However, Postmodernists are hesitant to use the term “relativism.” Rorty, for example, tries to soften the word ‘relative.’ He comments, “This view is often referred to as ‘cultural relativism.’ But it is not relativistic, if that means saying that every moral view is as good as every other. *Our* moral view is, I firmly believe, much better than any competing view, even though there are a lot of people whom you will never be able to convert to it. It is one thing to say, falsely, that there is nothing to choose between us and the Nazis. It is another thing to say, correctly, that there is no neutral, common ground to argue our differences. That Nazi and I will always strike one another as begging all the crucial questions, arguing in circles.”

Here, Rorty says that while there is no objective basis for determining what is right, he still insists that his view is right when compared with Nazi morality. But while making this claim, he also admits there is no way to judge between the two views. Still, he will fight for his moral view.

In the final analysis, each community places moral standards on its members’ actions. In other words, for a Postmodernist, the members of a particular community govern the moral choices its members are allowed to make. In that light, even Rorty insists that he can do whatever his particular community allows him to get away with.

3.6.3 EVOLVING MORALITY WITH A PUSH

For Postmodernists, community moral standards are decided by both coercion and consensus. Morality is not connected to God or dictated by any type of natural laws; rather, ethical systems are constructed within societies. Every culture, thus, has its own set of moral standards arising from the various influences within each particular group. Moreover, morality is not stagnant; it changes, adapts, and is constantly evolving according to the dictates of the group.

To demonstrate that moral standards are both set by culture and evolve with society, consider the example of abortion. In the past, most civilized Western societies, under the influence of Christian persuasion, detested the practice of abortion. However, in our current society, secular government and its citizens are more comfortable with this practice.

Why do Postmodernists such as Richard Rorty speak and write about moral issues if morality does not actually exist? Quiet simply, because Rorty is a consistent atheist and Darwinist. Since there is no God, no absolute morality, and ultimately no truth, then we get to construct the world in a way that best helps us survive. Rorty, therefore, advocates the subjective “ethical standards” that he prefers, standards he is personally comfortable with. For Rorty, words are merely “tools” of persuasion. There is no need to be logically consistent with words because words are instruments that, if used properly or creatively, invoke individuals to change. In the end, Rorty hopes that he will be able to persuade others (you) to view the world the way he does and even adopt his ideas and his moral standards.

In a very real sense, Rorty is trying to “push” the evolution of society’s moral standards into line with his own. In the end, morality and society operate like an unconscious negotiation—everyone in a community is presenting the beliefs he or she prefers; these ideas are considered, debated, and adapted; and in the end, consensus emerges—although the consensus is in a constant state of arbitration.

Think of it this way: morality is like a reality TV show challenge. The contestants are forced to work together in order to obtain what they personally desire. Everyone must work together or else no one gets anywhere. However, along the way Rorty wants to persuade others to adopt his ethical principles, and if he can, he wins. However, if someone who has a different set of values can persuade the others in the group, then Rorty’s ideas will lose favor, and he will be sidelined or even kicked off the island!

Not all Postmodernists agree with Rorty’s assessment. Postmodern psychiatrist Adam Phillips insists *any* ethical boundaries are “a form of pontification and imperial self-aggrandizement. . . . No adult can know what’s best for another adult; and, by the same token, no group or society can know what’s best for another group or society.” Phillips’ stance seems more in keeping with the overall Postmodern mindset, which does not allow anyone to be “right” on any particular issue, including ethics.

3.6.4 CONCLUSION

The following narrative poignantly illustrates the consequences of the breakdown of ethical values and social obligations, what happens when people actually put into practice the Postmodern idea of “it’s right for me.”

For over 15 years, British physician and psychiatrist Theodore Dalrymple cared for the poorest of the poor in London’s slums. From that experience, Dalrymple notes that the intellectuals of the twentieth century “sought to free our sexual relations of all social, contractual or moral obligations and meaning whatsoever, so that henceforth only raw sexual desire itself would count in our decision making.” When these ideas are adopted “both literally and wholesale in the lowest and most vulnerable social class,” he illustrates the real-life results: “If anyone wants to see what sexual relations are like, freed of contractual and social obligations, let him look at the chaos of the personal lives of members of the underclass. Here are abortions procured by abdominal kung fu; children who have children, in numbers unknown before the advent of chemical contraception and sex education; women abandoned by the father of their child a month before or a month after delivery; insensate jealousy, the reverse of the coin of general promiscuity, that results in the most hideous oppression and violence; serial stepfatherhood that leads to sexual and physical abuse of children on a mass scale; and every kind of loosening of the distinction between the sexually permissible and the impermissible.

While it may sound broadminded to argue that we should allow people to live as they please, the real world comes crashing in to reveal the consequences of flaunting the universal moral order. We know from Romans 1–2 that God clearly reveals not only His existence, but also His moral laws and the consequences we can expect when we disregard them. After reading Dalrymple’s graphic portrayal of the consequences of creating our own moral standards, we need to reevaluate the wisdom of the world in light of the wisdom of God in discovering the differences between right and wrong, good and evil.

God does not care what actions or philosophies any particular community or culture declare to be right and good if, according to His standards, they are wrong and evil. God does care that we know the truth He makes plain to us and that we understand the consequences of turning a blind eye to His standards of righteous thought and behavior.

Postmodern Biology

Biology can tell us little. . . . Selfhood is really nothing but a fleeting, unstable, incomplete and open-ended mess of desires which cannot be fulfilled.

— Jacques Lacan

[John] Dewey's idea is that we are special because we can take charge of our own evolution, take ourselves in directions which have neither precedent nor justification in either biology or history.

— Richard Rorty

Science and philosophy must jettison their grandiose metaphysical claims and view themselves more modestly as just another set of narratives.

— Terry Eagleton

4.6.1 INTRODUCTION

Worldviews that deny the existence of a Creator, a creation event, and the supernatural must assume some form of naturalistic evolution to explain the origin of life. Evolutionary theory takes three forms:

1. Classical Darwinism theorizes a gradual process of changes in species by means of *natural selection* or *survival of the fittest*, Charles Darwin's original thesis.
2. Neo-Darwinism came into vogue in the 1930s, expanding Darwin's original theory of natural selection to include change by *genetic mutation*.
3. Punctuated equilibrium or punctuated evolution arose in the 1970s, theorizing that evolutionary change happens abruptly (geologically speaking) in small, isolated populations.

While Secular Humanists believe and defend neo-Darwinism and Marxist/Leninists and Cosmic Humanists defend punctuated evolution (although not in exactly the same sense), Postmodernists have a tendency to shy away from overtly endorsing any particular theory of origins. This is the case, first of all, because Postmodernism began, not among scientists, but among literary critics and philosophers. Second, each of the three aforementioned versions of evolutionary theory is in itself a *grand story* about the origin and development of life and Postmodernists eschew all such grand stories or *metanarratives*.

To illustrate this state of affairs, Christian author Nancy Pearcey relates the following firsthand experience: "I witnessed a fascinating altercation at a conference at Boston University on science and postmodernism several years ago. Postmodernist philosophers led off by arguing that 'there are no metanarratives,' meaning no overarching, universal truths. Responding on behalf of the scientists was Nobel Prize-winning physicist Steven Weinberg, who replied: But of course there are metanarratives. After all, there's evolution—a vast metanarrative from the Big Bang to the origin of the solar system to origin of human life. And since evolution is true, that proves there is at least *one*

metanarrative To which the postmodernist philosophers responded, ever so politely: That's just *your* metanarrative. Evolution is merely a social construct, they said, like every other intellectual schema—a creation of the human mind.”

4.6.2 SCIENCE AND KNOWLEDGE

Postmodernism is anti-science in many respects. Some Postmodernists argue that science is not really knowledge at all. Instead, they speak in terms of chaos theory, the unpredictability of science, indeterminacy, or uncertainty of evolution/devolution, etc. For instance, Paul Feyerabend, former philosophy professor at the University of California (Berkeley) maintains that what is called science in one culture is called voodoo in another: “To those who look at the rich material provided by history, and who are not intent on impoverishing it in order to please their lower instincts—their craving for intellectual security in the form of clarity, precision, ‘objectivity,’ [or] ‘truth’—it will become clear that there is only one principle that can be defended under all circumstances and in all stages of human development. It is the principle: anything goes.”

In his article “Anything Goes,” Feyerabend further explains how science works. In the history of science many theories have arisen, been accepted as established, promoted as *the truth*, and then eventually discarded. When a scientist promotes scientific data in support of a theory, that bit of data is anything but neutral because the scientist has an agenda. In all fields of science questions remain open as scientific theories are regularly tweaked. And to top it off, the scientific establishment is very much politicized. Thus, scientists regularly work with unproven assumptions and filter all data through their preconceived ideas.

Doubts about the objectivity and neutrality of science arose in the mid-1900s from Michael Polanyi's *Personal Knowledge* and **Thomas Kuhn's** *The Structure of Scientific Revolution*. Kuhn, for example, points out that science is not merely a progressive and incremental discipline that studies and records facts. So-called *facts* can be understood and interpreted in a variety of ways depending on the worldview assumptions of the scientist.

In addition, Kuhn asserts that scientific theories, or paradigms, do not often fall out of favor because they are proven wrong. Rather, older theories tend to die out along with their proponents, while new and creative theories attract the attention of younger scientists who, in turn, promote their theories over the older ones. A current scientific theory is just that: a *current* theory, which will be replaced by another *current* theory in the future. For that reason, science cannot tell us what is *real*, only what scientists believe to be the case at that particular time in history. This falls in line with the Postmodern concept that everyone, including the scientist, is locked into his or her particular culture and language, and thus cannot claim to have an objective picture of the world.

Even mathematics is not immune from Postmodern analysis. Doubts about the objectivity of math were brought to light with Douglas R. Hofstadter's Pulitzer prize winning book *Gödel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid*, published in 1979. This theme has been developed in other works. In *Ethnomathematics: A Multicultural View of Mathematical Ideas*, Marcia Ascher asserts that much of mathematics education depends upon assumptions of Western culture. For example, she writes that no other culture “need share the categories triangle, right triangle, hypotenuse of a right triangle” She further questions, “Is a square something that has external reality or is it something only in our minds?”

However, even in light of the Postmodernist aversion to metanarratives and doubts about science being able to describe the *real* world, when pressed for an explanation concerning the origin of life Postmodernists will assume anything *but* creationism! For this reason, Postmodernists embrace the only other alternative—one of the several forms of evolution.

4.6.3 POSTMODERN LEANINGS: NEO-DARWINISM TO PUNCTUATED EVOLUTION

Regarding the origin of life, some Postmodernists tend toward neo-Darwinism. For example, Richard Rorty endorses Daniel Dennett's book *Darwin's Dangerous Idea*, a book supporting the neo-Darwinian view and harshly criticizing Gould and Eldridge's theory of punctuated evolution. Postmodern political scientist Walter Truett Anderson's *The Next Enlightenment: Integrating East and West in a New Vision of Human Evolution* approvingly cites neo-Darwinist Richard Dawkins a number of times as representing a scientific rationalist approach to truth.

Postmodernists are drawn to evolution for at least two reasons: (1) they deny that humans are the necessary aim of evolution and (2) they believe chance is the primary catalyst of evolution. According to Michel Foucault, Hayden White, Paul deMan, and Thomas Kuhn, the notion that human beings are the *telos* or ultimate end of evolution is anthropocentric (it assumes humanity is special). Neo-Darwinist Daniel Dennett concurs. In *Darwin's Dangerous Idea*, Dennett writes of "the most common misunderstanding of Darwinism: the idea that Darwin showed that evolution by natural selection is a procedure for *producing* Us."

Three reasons are generally given for holding this view. First, modern science has shattered the early religious myths of Adam and Eve, so we can no longer believe that God created humanity for some special purpose. Second, scientists already are at work evolving the next generation of humans by integrating people and computer technology, thus rendering human existence simply one small step in the total evolutionary progression. Third, considering all the species that have ever lived, *homo sapiens* is considered an insignificant species. Stephen Gould, for example, argues that "bacteria are—and always have been—the dominant form of life on Earth." Therefore, Gould maintains that we are arrogant in thinking that we are a special species or that evolution somehow had humanity in mind, since there are so few of "Us" and so many of "them."

In addition to this anti-teleological stance, Tony Jackson explains why the idea of chance appeals to Postmodernists. He writes about the role Stephen Gould has played in this regard. "To complete our discussion of Darwinian theory, Gould's inclusion of chance makes him the most Postmodern of contemporary Darwinists. It has led him to put forth a theory of change, called punctuated equilibrium, that stresses abruptness and discontinuity rather than the more conventional gradualist story, and thus he is the Darwinian equivalent of, again, Thomas Kuhn and Michel Foucault. Kuhn, like Gould, holds that the actual historical record does not support a gradualist 'development-by-accumulation' story."

Kuhn, Gould, and others insist that a gradualist history of the past is merely arbitrary. The actual fossil record does not confirm one species gradually turning into another species. On the contrary, species seem to appear in the fossil record suddenly, with little evidence of gradual transitions from one to another. Therefore, some Postmodernists opt to embrace the theory of punctuated equilibrium (or punctuated evolution) developed by Niles Eldredge and Stephen Jay Gould. (This theory is described in detail in the biology section on Marxist/Leninism.)

4.6.4 FOUCAULT'S HOPEFUL MONSTER

Also leaning toward a view of punctuated evolution is Michel Foucault. Foucault likewise denies that nature manifests the continuity necessary for Darwin's gradualist theory of evolution. He says, "Experience does not reveal the continuity of nature as such, but gives it to us both broken up . . . and blurred, since the real, geographic and terrestrial space in which we find ourselves confronts us with creatures that are interwoven with one another, in an order which is . . . nothing more than

chance, disorder, or turbulence.” Rather than a continuous progression from simple elements (minerals), through plants, animals, and finally human beings, Foucault sees “a confused mingling of beings that seem to have been brought together by chance.”

Foucault settles for a discontinuity of nature and argues for “revolutions in the history of the earth” including “geological catastrophes.” The elements of nature that he believes brought about the various species include the earth’s relationship to the sun, climatic conditions, movements of the earth’s crust, floods, comets, oceans, volcanoes, and heat.

Another possibility proposed for the advent of new species is monsters. Foucault approvingly quotes J. B. Robinet to the effect that monsters are not of a different nature, but rather “we should believe that the most apparently bizarre forms . . . belong necessarily and essentially to the universal plan of being; that they are metamorphoses of the prototype just as natural as the others, even though they present us with different phenomena; that they serve as [a] means of passing to adjacent forms; that they prepare and bring about the combinations that follow them, just as they themselves were brought about by those that preceded them; that far from disturbing the order of things, they contribute to it. It is only, perhaps, by dint of producing monstrous beings that nature succeeds in producing beings of greater regularity and with a more symmetrical structure.” While this theory may be imaginative, it has no grounding in observable science.

4.6.5 CONCLUSION

Christians need not agree with the extreme conclusion that contemporary Postmodernists derive from Kuhn’s theories of indeterminacy. Although Christians acknowledge that scientists do have biases and presuppositions, we also assert that true knowledge about reality is possible. Philosopher J. P. Moreland explains the Christian position this way: “Science (at least as most scientists and philosophers understand it) assumes that the universe is intelligible and not capricious, that the mind and senses inform us about reality, that mathematics and language can be applied to the world, that knowledge is possible, that there is a uniformity in nature that justifies inductive inferences from the past to the future and from examined cases of, say, electrons, to unexamined cases, and so forth.”

Saying much the same thing is Secular Humanist Paul Kurtz. In *Humanist Manifesto 2000*, Kurtz insists that rejecting objectivity is a mistake and that Postmodernism is counterproductive, even nihilistic. Kurtz writes, “Science does offer reasonably objective standards for judging its truth claims. Indeed, science has become a universal language, speaking to all men and women no matter what their cultural backgrounds.”

Along the same lines, Lee Campbell, chair of the Division of Natural Sciences at Ohio Dominican College, writes, “The methods used in the sciences have produced powerful explanations about how things work and innumerable useful applications, including technology even its harshest critics would never be without.” Indeed, Postmodernists use all the comforts and conveniences that modern science and technology provide, yet at the same time deny the foundational premises on which science is established. This brings to light the contradictions within the Postmodern worldview and reveals it to be unreliable.

In contrast with Postmodernism’s failed approach to science, history confirms the reality and progressive reliability of the scientific method. In fact, modern science came about because of a biblical view of reality. Campbell writes, “The rise of modern science would have been impossible without Christian presuppositions that the universe is rational because it was created by a rational God.” In his book *For the Glory of God*, Rodney Stark details why Christianity (rather than Islam, Cosmic Humanism, or any of the atheistic Humanisms) is the worldview most responsible for modern science. Indeed, the father of modern science, Sir Francis Bacon, was a Christian, as were

many of the leading scientists who founded the disciplines of chemistry, paleontology, bacteriology, antiseptic surgery, genetics, thermodynamics, computer science, and many other fields.

Postmodern Psychology

“[A]ll ideas about human reality are social constructions.”

— WALTER TRUETT ANDERSON

5.6.1 INTRODUCTION

Psychology, understood as the study of the psyche, or soul, has fallen on hard times. Traditionally, we understood our personal identity as what we are born with—a stable, unified soul including mind, heart, will, and conscience. Yet, in recent years, our Postmodern condition has made the concept of a “soul” obsolete. Now, instead of being a soul, we are confronted with a multiplicity of “selves.”

Hazel Rose Markus, professor of psychology at the University of Michigan, calls this “the most exciting time in psychology in decades and decades.” We have begun to realize, she says, that “there isn’t just one answer to the ‘Who am I?’ question.” Mitchell Stephens, a journalism professor at New York University explains that “mutating lifestyles and changing intellectual currents have led a group of increasingly influential psychologists—Postmodern psychologists seems to be the name that is sticking—to the conclusion that we have no single, separate, unified self. They maintain that we contain many selves and that the proper response to the suggestion ‘Get in touch with yourself’ or ‘Be yourself’ is ‘Which one?’”

Stephens offers the following example to clarify this point. “Consider . . . Mick Jagger. The Rolling Stones’ lead singer was and, if the tabloids are to be believed, remains a classic libertine, but he is also a father and, until recently at least, a family man. Jagger is a rock’n’roller, a bohemian, whose songs and lifestyle challenge traditional standards of behavior; yet he travels in upper-class British circles, hobnobbing with dukes and princesses. Jagger can be coarse and crude, yet he knows his nonfiction and his vintages. Which is the real Mick? His answer: all of the above. ‘People find it very hard to accept that you can be all these things at almost the same time,’ Jagger has complained.”

According to philosopher Allan Bloom, “The self is the modern substitute for the soul.” In other words, the traditional idea of an immaterial soul as being the seat of our personal identity has been replaced with the Postmodern notion of socially constructed “selves.” Reflecting historically on how this shift came about, Bloom suggests that society’s earlier preoccupation with the soul “inevitably led to neglect of this world in favor of the other world,” giving the priest, as the guardian of the soul, increased influence and power. This, in turn corrupted kings. “Princes were rendered ineffective by their own or their subjects’ opinions about the salvation of their soul, while men slaughtered each other wholesale because of differences of such opinion. The care of the soul crippled men in the conduct of their lives.”

As a result, there developed a backlash against the soul. This shift was set in motion by Machiavelli (1460) and Thomas Hobbes (1651), who replaced the idea of the soul with “a feeling self.” As Bloom comments, Machiavelli and Hobbes “blazed the trail to the self, which has grown into the highway of a ubiquitous psychology without the psyche (soul).”

But the transformation did not stop there. By the time the French political theorist **Jean-Jacques Rousseau** came on the scene in the early 1700s, the self had degenerated into individual self-interest. Rousseau observed that self-interest was not a sufficient base for establishing “the common good,” a necessary foundation for political life.

At the beginning of the 21st century, Postmodernism had taken the emphasis on self-interest to its logical extreme. If there is no God’s-eye-view of what constitutes the individual, we are left to the changing whims of our social condition telling us who and what we are. And, as it turns out, the answers are as varied as there are people to express them.

5.6.2 THE DENIAL OF HUMAN NATURE

Elaborating on our Postmodern condition, Bloom explains, “Man is a culture being, not a natural being. What man has from nature [biology] is nothing compared to what he has acquired from culture. A culture, like the language that accompanies and expresses it, is a set of mere accidents that add up to a coherent meaning constitutive of man.”

Traditionally people sensed that both nature and culture are important for human development. But once the move was set in motion to negate nature and accent culture, Postmodernists jumped to banish nature altogether. This left only culture to shape the human psyche.

For Foucault, each of us is “a being which is at least partially subjected to socially produced constraints and divisions.” He sees “the modern-day notion of the self [as] bound up with, and inseparable from, the workings of social structures and institutions.” There is, therefore, no distinction “between public and private selves implied by the concept of human nature nor can the individual be reduced to individual consciousness.”

Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* as an important Postmodern text. Deleuze and Guattari reject the idea that the soul is naturally whole, unified, or coherent; rather it is a harmful illusion. Instead, they see the self as a flux of desires and intensities caught up in an ongoing process of change.

With the denial of human nature complete, the stage was set for the Postmodern definition of the socially constructed self. Ward explains, “There are many sides to the unfolding story of Postmodern identity, but the starting point is that the self is fundamentally social.”

5.6.3 SOCIALLY CONSTRUCTED SELVES

The psychology of the socially constructed self was developed by **Jacques Lacan**, a French psychologist, who was one of four French intellectuals of the 1960’s whose writings forged much of Postmodern thought. “Lacan’s vision of the self is outlined in his famous essay, ‘The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I,’ first published in 1949.” writes Glenn Ward. Then, quoting Lacan, “‘Selfhood is really nothing but a fleeting, unstable, incomplete and open-minded mess of desires which cannot be fulfilled.’”

Ward comments, “Lacan and Foucault propose that the stable, unified self has always been an illusion.” In their view, our identity is the result of social factors—“You are constructed by the social [e.g., language, geography, family, education, government, etc.] and are ultimately determined by it.”

Walter Truett Anderson puts it this way: “all ideas about human reality are social constructions.” In other words, what used to be called the soul “is replaced with a collage of social constructs.”

Stephens contends that “The implications of the [Postmodern] theory are large: It's not just that we each have different sides to our personality; it's that we have no central personality in relation to which all our varied behaviors might be seen as just ‘sides.’ We are, in other words, not absolutely anything.”

But there is more. Postmodern psychologists are now asserting there is no one “self,” but a multiplicity of “selves.” Kenneth Gergen is a psychology professor at Swarthmore College. His book, *The Saturated Self: Dilemmas of Identity in Contemporary Life*, is considered one of the best introductions to postmodern psychology. Gergen states, “. . . postmoderns are populated with a plethora of selves. In place of an enduring core of deep and indelible character, there is a chorus of invitations. Each invitation ‘to be’ also casts doubt on the wisdom and authenticity of the others. Further, the postmodern person senses the constructed character of all attempts at being—on the part of both self and others.”

Gergen’s assessment of the postmodern condition has a following among other Postmodern psychologists. Stephens writes that “a group of counselors and therapists, for example, has begun noting that we all must ‘create’ other selves as we leave our families in search of friendship, success and love—and then move on to new friendships, new successes and new loves. Social psychologists have begun studying not only our ‘child selves,’ our ‘professional selves,’ our ‘friendship selves’ and our ‘parent selves,’ but also what Hazel Markus labels our ‘possible selves,’ our ‘feared possible selves,’ our ‘ideal selves,’ our ‘fleeting selves,’ our ‘tentative selves’ and our ‘chronically accessible selves.’”

To illustrate our postmodern multiplicity of selves, Gergen paints the following collage of postmodern life: “Connie spent her childhood in New Jersey. After her parents were divorced, her mother moved with the children to San Diego. Connie's teen years were spent shuttling between father and mother on either coast. After she graduated from the University of Colorado, she moved to Alaska to work on a fishing boat, and then to Wyoming to become a ski instructor. Now Connie is working on a geological-survey vessel in the Antarctic, and is engaged to a man living in Portland, Oregon. “Fred is a neurologist who spends many of his spare hours working to aid families from El Salvador. Although he is married to Tina, on Tuesday and Thursday nights he lives with an Asian friend with whom he has a child. On weekends he drives his BMW to Atlantic City for gambling.”

Gergen is pointing out that in our technologically “saturated” society with its multiple opportunities for personal interaction, it is impossible to know which is our “real” self, since we play so many different roles at different times and with different people. This can be disorienting to some. A theory of multiple **socially constructed selves** provides a way for those living in a postmodern world to adjust to the reality of their condition.

5.6.4 CRITIQUE OF POSTMODERN PSYCHOLOGY

A socially constructed, unstable self creates special difficulties in the area of law, crime, and punishment. For example, if a self were to “flux” quickly, a criminal act on a particular night of rape and pillage may be blamed on a previous shifting self, making it difficult to locate and punish the guilty “self.” Louis Sass, a Rutgers clinical psychology professor, puts it this way, “There are clearly dangers in giving up that notion of a single self. You absolve the person of responsibility for making judgments.” Imagine the excuses people might make: “Hey, it wasn't my fault. One of my other selves did it.”

Not only are there problems in the area of law, crime and punishment, but there are also major problems deciding exactly what is normal and abnormal. Walter Truett Anderson addresses this

problem when he says, “I have been putting words like ‘abnormal’ and ‘deviant’ in quotes, because those categorizations are under fire now, the boundary between normal and abnormal as questionable now as all the other boundaries that once defined social reality.”

According to Anderson, Postmodernists are not in the boundary business. Certainly if they can’t find boundaries between the biological and the cultural (nature and nurture), why should we expect them to find boundaries between the normal and abnormal? For example, Michel Foucault knowingly infected his homosexual partners with the AIDS virus. This should cause even the most devout Postmodernist to think twice before blurring the boundaries between sane and insane, normal and abnormal, and common sense and the ridiculous. If Postmodernists consider Foucault’s behavior “normal,” then there is no definition of abnormal worth considering.

It should also be noted that among the majority of psychologists, Postmodernist psychology is viewed as a fringe movement. At this point it seems unlikely that the Postmodern approach to psychology will have a major influence on the future direction of psychology in general.

5.6.5 CONCLUSION

Christian psychology is founded on the concept of soul (mind, heart), self-identity, and self-awareness (1 Thessalonians 5:23). In Genesis 2:7, we learn that God breathed and mankind became a living soul. In Matthew 10:28, Jesus warns us not to fear those who can kill the body, but rather fear the one who can kill the body (soma) and soul (psyche) in hell (gehenna).

J.P. Moreland summarizes the biblical concept of our identity when he says, “Human beings are composed of an immaterial entity—a soul, a life principle, a ground of sentience—and a body. More specifically, a human being is a unity of two distinct entities—body and soul.”

Originally “psychology” meant the study of the psyche (soul). Now that we have entered into a post-Christian culture, maybe psychologists need to search for another name to describe their profession. Perhaps this is what Christian Psychologist Paul C. Vitz had in mind when he wrote the article, “Psychology in Recover.” Vitz offers the following suggestion at the end of his article, “I close on a guardedly optimistic note. On the horizon I see the potential for a psychology that I call ‘transmodern.’ By this term I mean a new mentality that both transcends and transforms modernity. Thus, it will leave both modern and Postmodern psychology behind. It will bring in transcendent understanding that may be idealistic and philosophical (e.g., the virtues), as well as spiritual and religious. It will transform modernity by bringing in an intelligent understanding of much of premodern wisdom In such a transmodern world, psychology would be the handmaid of philosophy and theology, as from the beginning it was meant to be.”

Postmodern Sociology

“I have been putting words like ‘abnormal’ and ‘deviant’ in quotes because those categorizations are under fire now, the boundary between normal and abnormal as questionable now as are all the other boundaries that once defined social reality.”

— WALTER TRUETT ANDERSON

6.6.1 INTRODUCTION

The Postmodern views of how we live together in society are nontraditional regarding family, church, and state. Foucault says, “the society in which we live, the economic relations within which it functions and the system of power which defines the regular forms and the regular permissions and prohibitions of our conduct . . . the essence of our life consists, after all, of the political functioning of the society in which we find ourselves.” Foucault thus sees the social order consisting of economics, law, and the state. Living within this order is “the essence of our life” since our culture determines who we are. Life is merely a summary of the cultural aspects of the social community since there is no unified self.

Foucault does not include the church in his view of societal institutions. Postmodernists, for the most part, want nothing to do with the church. In *The Future of Religion*, Rorty replaces his atheism with “antiercliceralism,” contending that “congregations of the faithful” are socially unobjectionable, but “ecclesiastical institutions” are dangerous to the health of democratic societies. To Rorty, “religion is unobjectionable as long as it is privatized.” In other words, private religious views are acceptable, but the organized church is not.

6.6.2 SEXUAL EGALITARIANISM

Many Postmodern socialists consider marriage the greatest of evils. Rorty is particularly harsh on Christian parents who teach their children about God, referring to them as “frightening, vicious, and dangerous.”

Other Postmodernists show their contempt for Christian concepts of love, sex, and marriage, preferring various forms of “free love” (hooking up, shacking up, living together, cohabitation, etc.). Postmodernist psychiatrist Adam Phillips precludes the possibility of contractual marriage and describes any relationship in harsh terms: “The only sane foregone conclusion about any relationship is that it is an experiment; and that exactly what it is an experiment in will never be clear to the participants. For the sane, so-called relationships could never be subject to contract.”

Acknowledging the traditional heterosexual family as the norm in Western society, Postmodernists decry that this “heterosexist norm” enables society “to marginalize some sexual practices as ‘against nature,’ and thereby [attempt] to prove the naturalness of the heterosexual monogamy and family values upon which mainstream society bases itself.”

Postmodernists encourage open conversation about the way we experience sexual relationships. Foucault maintains that talking about sex helps to create sexual diversity. He says, “The putting into

discourse of sex, far from undergoing a process of restriction, on the contrary has been subjected to a mechanism of increasing incitement . . . the techniques of power exercised over sex have not obeyed a principle of rigorous selection, but rather one of dissemination and implantation of **polymorphous sexualities.**”

Talking about sex reveals “an ever expanding encyclopedia of preferences, gratifications and perversions. It creates a realm of perversion by discovering, commenting on and exploring it. It brings it into being as an object of study and in doing so serves to categorize and objectify those who occupy what has been made into the secret underworld of ‘deviance.’” Foucault says, “We must . . . ask why we burden ourselves today with so much guilt for having once made sex a sin.” Foucault was “a disciple of the Marquis de Sade,” and like him embraced all sexual activity as permissible, including man/boy relationships (pederasty). Few boundaries exist in a socially constructed reality.

What used to be considered perverted, abnormal, or deviant sexual behavior is now viewed as personal preference, and no moral pronouncements are attached to the actions. The line between heterosexual and homosexual practices is blurred. **Walter Truett Anderson** says, “I have been putting words like ‘abnormal’ and ‘deviant’ in quotes because those categorizations are under fire now, the boundary between normal and abnormal as questionable now as are all the other boundaries that once defined social reality.”

We use the term “**sexual egalitarianism**” to characterize the Postmodern view that allows each person to define his or her sexuality and proposes that all sexual preferences are equally valid.

6.6.3 POLITICALLY CORRECT EDUCATION

Anderson explains the goals and methods Postmodernists adopt in regard to education: “[Postmodernism] rejects the notion that the purpose of education is primarily to train a child’s cognitive capacity for reason in order to produce an adult capable of functioning independently in the world. That view of education is replaced with the view that education is to take an essentially indeterminate being and give it a social identity. Education’s method of molding is linguistic, and so the language to be used is that which will create a human being sensitive to its racial, sexual, and class identity.”

Anderson outlines major shifts in focus in the Postmodern classroom in contrast to the modern classroom: “Education should emphasize works not in the canon, it should focus on the achievements of non-whites, females and the poor; it should highlight the historical crimes of whites, males, and the rich; and it should teach children that science’s method has no better claim to yielding truth than any other method and, accordingly, that students should be equally receptive to alternative ways of knowing.”

Postmodern education teaches that all truth is relative, all cultures are equally deserving of respect (although Western culture comes under severe criticism), and all values are subjective (although racism, sexism, classism, and homophobia are universally evil).

Course offerings at colleges and universities in the Postmodern age are also nontraditional, focusing on themes of race, sex, and gender. For example, Stanford University’s Feminist Studies Department offers “Lesbian Communities and Identities.” The catalog describes the course as “Scholarship and research on lesbian experience. Issues of homophobia, lesbian intimacy, and sexuality. Femme and butch roles, lesbian separatism, and diversity of lesbian communities and identities.” Stanford’s History Department offers a course entitled “Homosexuals, Heretics, Witches, and Werewolves: Deviants of Medieval Society.” The catalog describes the course as

answering the following question: “Why were medieval heretics accused of deviant sexual practices?”

Every Ivy League school except Princeton offers more courses in Women’s Studies than in Economics. Columbia’s Women’s Studies Department offers “The Invisible Woman in Literature: The Lesbian Literary Tradition,” “Introduction to Gay and Lesbian Studies,” and “Gendered Controversies: Women’s Bodies and Global Contestations.”

Dartmouth’s Women’s Studies Department offers “Shakespeare and Gender,” described in the course catalog as answering the questions, “Is language gender-inflected? How is power exerted and controlled in sexual relationships?” Dartmouth’s English Department offers a course called “Queer Theory, Queer Texts.”

Brown University offers these departments and courses: “Afro-American Studies—‘Black Lavender: Study of Black Gay/Lesbian Plays;’ Education—‘The Psychology of Race, Class, and Gender;’ English—‘Unnatural Acts: Introduction to Lesbian/Gay Literature.’”

Not only has the subject matter of courses and departments shifted dramatically away from traditional fare, Christianity is often viewed with contempt and ridicule. Richard Rorty, Professor of Comparative Literature at Stanford, writes, “When we American college teachers encounter religious fundamentalists . . . we do our best to convince these students of the benefits of secularization . . . I think these students are lucky to find themselves under . . . people like me, and to have escaped the grip of their frightening, vicious, dangerous parents.”

Not all new courses are met with enthusiasm. Richard Zeller, a sociology professor at Bowling Green State University in Ohio, attempted to introduce a new course that would examine the effects of political correctness in response to students’ claims that they felt pressured to assume politically correct views in order to pass courses. BGSU’s Director of Women’s Studies, Kathleen Dixon, protested vehemently, saying, “We forbid any course that says we restrict free speech.” The course was voted down, and Zeller resigned in protest after twenty-five years of teaching at Bowling Green.

6.6.4 “NEW WAYS OF LIVING”

The Postmodern approach to restructuring society calls for “challenging power on a day-to-day level.” Lyotard suggests we “gnaw away at the great institutionalized narrative apparatuses . . . by increasing the number of skirmishes that take place on the sidelines. That’s what women who have had abortions, prisoners, conscripts, prostitutes, students, and peasants have been doing.”

Other “new ways of living” that might restructure society toward a Postmodern view could include any of the following “skirmishes on the sidelines:” pick a quarrel with your conservative neighbor; refuse to buy a certain brand of condensed milk; surf the net at work; deface billboards; sell pirated copies of CDs; buy fake designer labels; celebrate fragmentation, diversity and deviancy; teach a “safe-sex” course in church or school; turn vices into virtues; make the abnormal normal; legalize sodomy; decriminalize marijuana; legalize same-sex marriage; praise the concept of a “living” Constitution; subscribe to MTV; attend art exhibits by Andy Warhol, a Madonna concert, a performance of *the V-Monologues*; view X-rated movies; protest Christian prayer in government schools; support the A.C.L.U; defend NAMBLA; label Christians and conservatives as right-wing religious fanatics or Fascists; support the Green Party; protest “under God” in the pledge; remove “In God We Trust” from U. S. money; support all tax increases; publicly burn your fur coat; drink French wine; help an illegal alien across the border; keep Intelligent Design out of the schools; join the anti-globalization protests; and so on. “None of these activities might strike you as

particularly radical—they are perhaps not going to bring about a revolution—but from Lyotard’s point of view they can be valued as disruptive skirmishes in the social system.”

6.6.5 SUBVERTING THE ARTS

Dada, a nihilistic movement in the arts that attempted to demolish aesthetic standards in the years after World War I, is sometimes linked to the more radical elements of Postmodernism. Ward explains, “Dada, especially, is often seen as the original prototype of how art should go about the business of being radical . . . Dada employed a number of tactics to disrupt bourgeois fantasies about art. Most prominent of these methods was the use of ‘found’ materials not conventionally associated with fine art. They took materials from the gutter, images from mass culture, and styles of presentation from shop window displays. Most famous of all, Marcel Duchamp exhibited signed Readymades—a urinal, a bottle rack, a comb, etc.—and eventually got them called art (or anti-art).”

Stephen Hicks elaborates further on the link between Dada and Postmodernism in *Explaining Postmodernism*: “Dada’s themes are about meaninglessness, but its works and manifestos are meaningful philosophical statements in the context in which they are presented. ‘Art is -----’ was, fittingly, the motto of the Dada movement. Duchamp’s urinal was the fitting symbol. Everything is waste to be flushed away.”

Over the past thirty years, a number of popular recording artists have expressed elements of Postmodern thought in their style of music and in their lyrics. This nihilistic philosophy is expressed in the 1977 song by British band Ian Dury and the Blockheads. The opening stanza reads, “Sex and drugs and rock ‘n’ roll are all my brain and body needs.” John Mayer’s 2003 release *Any Given Thursday* expresses the meaninglessness of life in the lyrics, “I just found out there’s no such thing as the real world. Just a lie you’ve got to rise above. I am invincible as long as I’m alive.” The group Third Eye Blind’s song “Horror Show,” featured on the *Varsity Blues* soundtrack (1999), says:

When gravity presses down like a lie
We want wild sex
But we don’t wanna die
Do you feel there’s nowhere to go
We’re the bait in a horror show
And we’re all alone in a horror show
Yeah, we are all alone in a horror show.

6.6.6 CRITIQUE OF PERMISSIVE SEX

Postmodernists did not invent sexual liberation, but are riding the crest of the wave started by others. Many cultural observers consider Alfred Kinsey the father of the sexual revolution—the 1960s social tsunami that changed the way we think about sex. Kinsey’s two reports, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (1948) and *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (1953), presented evidence contradicting the traditional view of sex and marriage. The scientific format of these reports drowned out concerns of critics—who can argue with science? The result has been comprehensive sex education that introduces young children to *Heather Has Two Mommies* and teaches teens the virtues of “safer” sex.

Now fifty years later, the startling discovery is that Kinsey’s research turns out to be a house of cards resting on dishonest research, fraud, and outright lies. The fact is, he used faulty methods for

gathering statistics. Kinsey's reports claim to be representative of a cross-section of the nation. In actuality, his team interviewed a disproportionate number of prisoners, pimps, prostitutes, pedophiles, and unmarried adults.

Second, the majority of those interviewed had *volunteered* to reveal their sexual histories to an interviewer. Well-known psychologist Abraham Maslow pointed out to Kinsey at the time that using volunteers would bias the results toward the non-normal end of the behavioral scale.

Third, some of the information Kinsey reported could have been gathered only through criminal activity! As it turns out, buried in the report, Kinsey admits that some of his statistics were taken from the personal diaries of pedophiles (although Kinsey did not use that term).

Fourth, and more telling, was the naturalistic worldview at the root of Kinsey's research (the same naturalism that is foundational to Postmodernism). Kinsey, like current-day Postmodernists, blurred the line between behavior and morality by assuming that human behavior is no different in kind than animal behavior. Based on this view, there is no moral value attached to the various kinds of sexual acts that are available to the human species. Thus, whatever a person does sexually is natural, whatever is natural is permissible, and whatever is permissible is good, even for children.

As we are fond of saying, "Ideas have consequences." And, as it turns out, the results of Kinsey's ideas have led many down a destructive path. One result has been the skyrocketing incidence of sexually transmitted diseases over the past 50 years. In Kinsey's day, there were only two known STD's, both of which were treatable with penicillin. But today, that number has blossomed to over 24, with over a dozen having no cure! The capstone of this proliferation of disease is HIV, a virus that can be passed on through homosexual sex acts which, thanks to Kinsey's mainstreaming of homosexuality, has also been on the increase.

In contrast to the view of sexual license that Kinsey promoted, a 1996 study published by researchers at The University of North Carolina supports the traditional view of sex. The study found that lower sexual activity among adolescents is correlated with higher levels of well being. For example, sexually active girls are over three times as likely to report depressive symptoms than those who abstain, and sexually active boys are over twice as likely to report depressive symptoms. In fact, these two groups report higher incidence of suicide attempts; boys in particular are at 8 times the risk for a suicide attempt if they are sexually active.

In addition, according to a study published in 2000 by Edward Laumann and colleagues, "a monogamous sexual partnership embedded in a formal marriage evidently produces the greatest satisfaction and pleasure."

What we find, then, is a wholesale repudiation of Kinsey's assumption that humans are simply sexual animals living in an amoral world. On the contrary, true science confirms that sexual intimacy finds its highest fulfillment in a monogamous marital relationship with the prospect of producing children.

As the Bible eloquently states, "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh." This is not only the religious view, but the one view that assures the ultimate happiness of individuals as well as a sure foundation for a healthy society.

6.6.7 CONCLUSION

While the Postmodern vision for Western culture may be taking hold, as Christians we need to take seriously the Cultural Commission God gave Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 1:28), placing them in charge of His creation. The clear direction of this commission goes beyond tending the garden and naming animals. God commanded them to "multiply" and fill the earth with

people. The command implies taking charge of a growing social order as well. Jesus echoes this theme when He tells His disciples they are “salt and light” (Matthew 5:13–14). Jesus means that if our society is tasteless and dark, it is *our* fault for not providing the preserving and enlightening influences! Furthermore, Jesus’ Great Commission (Matthew 28:18–20) speaks of the spiritual needs that we must address as well. Nowhere does Scripture rescind God’s Cultural Commission—it is still our responsibility.

Christians should be involved in every area of society: in education as teachers, administrators, board members, and textbook selection committee members; in government as leaders at the local, state, and federal levels; as artists, developing the best art, recording the most inspiring music, and writing books and producing cutting edge movies with compelling storylines that capture the imagination of every reader or viewer; in families, as loving parents and role models; in communities, as business leaders and civic club members; in the media, as reporters and writers who are seen and read by millions. In the midst of these endeavors, we should share God’s wonderful love story with those who will listen. When we participate in the Great Commission conjoined with the Cultural Commission, we are fulfilling God’s purpose for us during our earthly sojourn.

Postmodern Law

“[Postmodernism] is a powerful and coherent mindset. It provides a philosophical outlook (social constructionism), a legal reform program, and a set of governing metaphors, all in one convenient package. This package has the added benefit of resonating with ideas that are popular in other parts of the academy. If one has doubts about the social construction of truth or merit, one can rest assured that the matter has been settled in the impenetrable prose of some esteemed French philosophers.”

— DANIEL A. FARBER AND SUZANNE SHERRY

7.6.1 INTRODUCTION

Before exploring the topic of Postmodern law, it may be helpful to give the discussion an historical context. No one does this better than Harold J. Berman, former professor of law at Harvard Law School. Berman maintains that there is currently a major debate over our understanding of law. The West’s legal system is rooted in certain beliefs, he writes, including “the structural integrity of law, its ongoingness, its religious roots, [and] its transcendent qualities.”

However, Berman explains that today these foundational beliefs are rapidly disappearing, not only from the minds of philosophers, but from “the minds of lawmakers, judges, lawyers, law teachers . . . [and] from the consciousness of the vast majority of citizens. . . . The law is becoming fragmented, more subjective, geared more to expediency and less to morality, concerned more with immediate consequences and less with consistency or continuity. Thus the historical soil of the

Western legal tradition is being washed away in the twentieth century, and the tradition itself is threatened with collapse.”

Declaring that the Western legal tradition is on the verge of collapse is a bold statement, but not too strong for the situation we are facing in the early years of the twenty-first century. Berman notes the historical background for this dramatic shift in ideology. In many ways, Western civilization has never recovered from the utter destruction and slaughter of World War I (1914–1918). That war, fought within the Western powers and traditions, cast grave doubts about the viability and desirability of Western traditions, as the most enlightened, best educated, most scientifically astute of all peoples proceeded to mow themselves down in frightening numbers. This led, Berman says, to a “loss of confidence in the West itself, as a civilization . . . and in the legal tradition which for nine centuries has helped to sustain it.” The current crisis in Western civilization has paved the way for a new approach to legal theory. This is where Postmodernism finds a foothold to enter the debate over the place and substance of law.

7.6.2 REJECTION OF ENLIGHTENMENT IDEAS

Postmodernists view the European Enlightenment as a white male undertaking that elevated reason and empirical data. It focused on objective knowledge of a real world, such as the scientific method for discovering objective facts about the universe, and the concept of justice in relation to law.

From a Postmodern perspective, the source of knowledge and justice is at the root of the problem. Postmodernists insist that Western law, which grew out of Christianity and the Enlightenment, reflects white male bias. They attack “the concepts of reason and objective truth, condemning them as components of white male domination. They prefer the more subjective ‘ways of knowing’ supposedly favored by women and minorities, such as storytelling. As to the rule of law, it is an article of [Postmodern] faith that legal rules are indeterminate and serve only to disguise the law’s white male bias.” For this reason, Postmodernists are intent on eliminating religious roots and transcendent qualities from Western law. They desire more fragmentation and subjectivity, and less objective morality than the Judeo-Christian tradition demands. In the end, they are intent on creating and using their own brand of social justice merely for left-wing political purposes.

7.6.3 CRITICAL LEGAL STUDIES

At the center of this assault on traditional Western law is the **Critical Legal Studies** movement. Critical Legal Studies (CLS) publishes “critiques of law focused on progressive—even radical—political change rather than on efficient government.” In fact, the CLS slogan is “critique is all there is.” Using Derrida’s deconstruction principle, they dissect a law to discover its subjective meaning, no matter what the law objectively states.

“While CLS and the newer movements share a left-leaning or progressive outlook, the new movements tend to have a narrower focus. . . . [T]he new radicals concentrate on race and gender issues, and particularly on how the law creates or contributes to unequal power relations,” according to Farber and Sherry.

The Postmodern thesis is that “reality is socially constructed by the powerful in order to perpetuate their own hegemony [power over other people]. As one radical feminist puts it, ‘Feminist analysis begins with the principle that objective reality is a myth.’” To amplify the focus on the

legal inequalities imposed on women and minorities by those in power, CLS includes the core ideas of “the thought of French postmodernists such as Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida. This meant extending the insight that law is socially constructed into an argument that everything is socially constructed.” From Foucault, Postmodern legal radicals draw the assertion that what counts for objective knowledge “is a power relation, one category of people benefiting at the expense of another category of people.” Foucault sees all relationships between people as power relationships. Universal standards of legal judgment, common to all, do not exist. Any claim to universal truth is merely a mask for gaining political power over women and minorities.

Stanley Fish, professor of Law and English, argues, “the name of the game has always been politics.” One example of the Postmodern focus on politics over objective knowledge has been provided by Susan Estrich, Professor of Law and Political Science at the University of Southern California Law School and a syndicated columnist who has worked with many liberal politicians and appeared on numerous television talk shows. Estrich was asked why she supported Anita Hill when Hill charged Clarence Thomas (during his confirmation hearings for the Supreme Court) with sexual harassment but opposed Paula Jones when she made sexual harassment allegations against President Clinton. Ms. Estrich replied, “You believe in principle; I believe in politics.”

Estrich, like Marx, Nietzsche, and Foucault, sees law simply as a tool for political power. According to Marx, “Political power, properly so called, is merely the organized power of one class for oppressing another.” Estrich implies that she uses the law in any way necessary to get what she wants. Thus, the law is no longer a God-ordained, objective standard by which to judge behavior and maintain an ordered society, but a weapon to beat political opponents into submission to a point of view.

7.6.4 STORIES AND THE LAW

In place of objective reasoning, Postmodernists use storytelling as a better way to arrive at equitable law, since it is open to multiple points of view and varied interpretations. Stories are easier to manipulate to meet a political end than are empirical facts. Farber and Sherry explain the way Postmodernists rely on story: “Because the scholarship of women and people of color reflects their distinctive knowledge [gained from listening to and telling stories], the radical multiculturalists argue, it cannot be judged or tested by traditional standards. Instead, they imply, it should be judged according to its political effect: it should be judged ‘in terms of its ability to advance the interests of the outsider community,’ because ‘outsider scholarship is often aimed not at understanding the law, but at changing it.’”

One current issue that illustrates the Postmodern use of stories is global warming. Although empirical scientific data show no significant temperature increases worldwide, pressure from the radical left has been exerted on the United States to sign an international global warming treaty. Some of the pressure comes from creating stories that appeal to the emotions. For example, the film *The Day After Tomorrow* is an emotion-charged story about what will happen *when* global warming gets out of control. The film does not deal with facts about whether global warming is an actual threat to the planet; it simply assumes it is and builds the story from there.

This illustrates the Postmodern focus on rhetoric rather than logic. Since logic and dispassionate reasoning are seen as tools of white male bias, rhetoric and story are used to effect political change, regardless of scientific arguments to the contrary. Farber and Sherry illustrate how this shift is impacting legal theory: “Rather than relying solely on legal or interdisciplinary authorities, empirical data, or rigorous analysis, legal scholars have begun to offer stories, often about their own real or imagined experiences.”

The emotional impact of story can be used to replace rationality in the courtroom and in the media. Faber and Sherry cite the case of Tawana Brawley as an example of how racially motivated attorneys and politicians could manipulate a story to undermine legal facts in the courtroom. Brawley, a fifteen-year-old black girl, claimed she was abducted, raped, and tortured by a group of white men that included a state district attorney and two police officers. It was later shown that she had made up the entire story as a distraction to get her stepfather to forgive her for running away from home. However, even though the grand jury found that no crime had been committed, the following was written about the case: “Tawana Brawley has been the victim of some unspeakable crime . . . no matter who did it to her—and even if she did it to herself. Her condition was clearly the expression of some crime against her.” Farber and Sherry continue, “In other words, whether it was true or false, Tawana Brawley’s story tells us something about the condition of black women.”

In this case, the story’s power to create an emotional backlash against the dominant culture of white males took precedence over the truth that those accused were innocent and that police officers and district attorneys protect women and minorities from danger more often than not regardless of race, age, or ethnicity.

7.6.5 CONCLUSION

Even if all knowledge were socially constructed, the matter of truth would remain important. Brawley’s story was false—not just in one community but in all communities—because truth is universal. If law is not based on objective truth, we can only look forward to authoritarianism and totalitarianism. Justice and truth must go hand in hand.

Trial lawyer Gary Saalman predicts the results of a Postmodern focus on racial, gender, and cultural politics becoming an integral part of the legal system: “Postmodern legal theory trickles down to breed cynicism toward all government and the entire criminal justice system. This, then, is the real issue. No one questions the fact that law requires interpretation, or that judges or juries may have acted unfairly, sometimes based on race or gender bias. The question is this: How do we view such unfairness? Do we accept that all people must inevitable be unfair and subjective, as postmodernists claim? Or do we recognize such unfairness as the evil it is and resist it? When we accept what postmodernism preaches, we lose all basis for calling the system to fairness. We instead challenge minority populations to pursue power so they can take their turn.”

Postmodern Politics

“I see the ‘orthodox’ (the people who think that hounding gays out of the military promotes traditional family values) as the same honest, decent, blinkered, disastrous people who voted for Hitler in 1933. I see the ‘progressives’ as defining the only America I care about.”

— RICHARD RORTY

8.6.1 INTRODUCTION

As keen observers of the Postmodern condition, Steven Best and Douglas Kellner comment on the current status of Postmodern politics: “As with postmodern theory, there is no one ‘postmodern politics,’ but rather a conflicting set of propositions that emerges from the ambiguities of social change and multiple postmodern theoretical perspectives.” Postmodern politics takes a variety of forms. On one end of the spectrum is the “anti-politics” of Baudrillard, a “cynical, despairing rejection of the belief” that politics can be used to change society. On the other side of Baudrillard’s negative, nihilistic approach is a more affirmative one, outlined by Foucault, Lyotard, and Rorty, who suggest that the way to “enhance individual freedom” and bring about “progressive change” is to concentrate on the local level.

Although there is a lack of consensus surrounding much of Postmodern politics, most agree Postmodernists fall on the left side of the political spectrum. Barbara Epstein, a self-proclaimed “moderate” Postmodernist, writes, “Many people, inside and outside the world of Postmodernism, have come to equate Postmodernism with the left.” Stephen R. C. Hicks agrees, writing, “Of the major names in the Postmodernist movement there is not a single figure who is not leftwing in a serious way.”

Most of the early French Postmodernists emerged from the Marxist tradition—some grew up in families supportive of leftist causes, and others were former Stalinists. Foucault initially joined the Maoist Gauche Proletarienne and the French Communist Party but left once he discovered the Marxist stance toward homosexuality. As time went on, Foucault moved further away from Marxism, particularly the “state-centered focus” of classic Marxism. Foucault would later write, “Marxism exists in nineteenth century thought as a fish exists in water; that is, it ceases to breathe anywhere else.” Anthony Thomson claims that Postmodernism is generally “fueled by the failure of Marxian-inspired State socialism.”

However, in spite of his aversion to some aspects of Marxism, Foucault does not abandon Marxist thought altogether. Specifically, Foucault remained under “the profound influence of Marxist analyses of power relations and the role of economic inequality in determining social structures.” Mark Lilla notes that Foucault felt he needed something “more radical” than classic Marxism, so he turned to “Nietzsche and Heidegger, but also avant-garde writers and Surrealists whose hostility to bourgeois life took more aesthetic and psychological forms.”

8.6.2 LEFTIST POLITICS

For Postmodernists, politics is not centered around political parties, utopian visions, or an ultimate *telos*; rather, it is a tool of experimentation that involves a radical critique of the existing systems of power in a society, the identification of oppressed groups, and the remedy for bringing those identified groups out of oppression to achieve a sense of social justice.

Some Postmodernists, including Foucault and Rorty, use terms such as *leftism* and *progressivism* to describe their approach to politics. For Foucault, progressive politics outlines the “possibilities for transformation and the play of dependencies between those transformations, whereas other politics rely upon the uniform abstraction of chance or the . . . presence of genius.” This means that “rather than seeing politics as being centered around individual great leaders who have utopian visions of the future . . . Foucault is more concerned to develop and describe a politics which takes account of the transformative possibilities within the present.”

Foucault assumes that in the same way there is no ultimate purpose (*telos*) to life, there is no ultimate purpose for politics or what he refers to as “the themes of meaning, origin . . . [or] the deep

teleology of a primeval destination.” Sara Mills writes, “Foucault seems to be trying to establish a basis for productive political activity without necessarily having to agree with a whole range of problematic assumptions about progress and the role of individuals bringing about political change”

Mills suggests that Foucault “does not seem to have felt it necessary to have a fully worked-out political position, since in some ways it was precisely this sense of having to hold to a party line which he was reacting against.” In other words, there is no right way to approach politics since there is no unifying story that is true for life or politics. Lyotard explains, “With the destruction of the grand narratives, there is no longer any unifying identity for the subject or society. Instead, individuals are the sites where ranges of conflicting moral and political codes intersect, and the social bond is fragmented.”

Foucault expresses his range of political leanings this way: “I think I have in fact, been situated in most of the squares on the political checkerboard, one after another and sometimes simultaneously: as anarchist, leftist, ostentatious or disguised Marxist, explicit or secret anti-Marxist, technocrat in the service of Gaullism, new liberal, etc . . . It’s true, I prefer not to identify myself and that I’m amused by the diversity of the ways I’ve been judged and classified.”

Foucault claims to have been in “most of the squares on the political checkerboard,” and along with most of Postmodernism’s founders, they played their game on the far left of the political game board! **Leftism** is therefore an appropriate term to summarize the Postmodern approach to politics.

8.6.3 IDENTITY POLITICS

Barbara Epstein explains where the early Postmodern movement began: “The constellation of trends that I am calling Postmodernism has its origins in the writings of a group of French intellectuals of the ‘60s, most preeminently Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Jacques Lacan, and Jean-Francois Lyotard. Those who developed Postmodernism tended to be associated with the radicalism of the ‘60s.”

The sexual and feminist revolutions that began in the sixties were intent on correcting the wrongs perpetuated by Western culture, especially the “puritanical” United States. What was wrong was identified as white, European, male, heterosexual, and Judeo Christian. Epstein observes that “one reason that Postmodernism has taken hold so widely is that it is much easier to be critical than to present a positive vision.” In their desire to tear down socio-political structures that they deemed oppressive, radical, or revolutionary, agitators developed the concept of *identity politics* to correct the social and political wrongs they deemed Western civilization had perpetuated.

Identity politics seeks to advance the interests of particular groups in society that are perceived as victims of social injustice. The *identity* of the oppressed group gives rise to a *political* basis around which they can unite. For example, radical feminists identified all women as victims of male oppression. Once they had established their case, then whatever was needed to free women from male domination was considered *politically correct*.

Alan Sokol quotes feminist Kelly Oliver: “[I]n order to be revolutionary, feminist theories should be political tools, strategies for overcoming oppression in specific concrete situations. The goal then, of feminist theory, should be to develop strategic theories—not true theories, not false theories, but strategic theories.” Since there are no true theories, the revolutionary way is to promote a theory that strategically accomplishes what needs to be accomplished.

For radical feminists, the ultimate goal became women’s equality with men, which means, among other things, total sexual freedom. To bring this about, the strategic theory proclaimed children a burden and marriage a form of slavery, counterproductive to a woman’s self-fulfillment. Abortion was declared a political right and women’s only means for sexual equality with men—

since men can engage in sexual intercourse without the consequences of bearing children, women must have the same freedom and political right.

Likewise, homosexuals were viewed as having been oppressed by a heterosexual majority who had forced their puritanical sexual mores onto society. The strategic theory marketed the homosexual lifestyle as normal, moral, healthy through television sit-coms about likeable homosexual characters, gay-themed movies, and public education that introduced very young children to appealing homosexual families.

Similarly, Postmodernists claim that white Europeans had dominated people of color for hundreds of years. The strategic theory claimed blacks and other minorities suffered an unfair disadvantage in admission to higher education. The concept of affirmative action was developed to guarantee minorities access to higher education, often at the expense of more qualified white applicants. In this way, years of minority subservience to white oppression is remedied and social justice is affirmed.

The strategies of identity politics have succeeded in changing the beliefs of a growing number of people throughout Western society, demonstrating the power of the Postmodern approach for shaping the terms of the debate.

8.6.4 MANIPULATION OF LANGUAGE

Another strategy Postmodernists use in pursuit of their political goals is the manipulation of language. Someone once noted that we will either master words or be mastered by those who do. Postmodernists have mastered the manipulation of language to such an extent that what used to be considered shameful, immoral, or bad behavior is now heralded as progressive. Postmodernists have succeeded in gaining public acceptance of the following:

- Believing in the sanctity of heterosexual marriage is a mark of backwardness, while favoring legalization of same-sex marriage is a mark of broadmindedness.
- Expressing belief in a male Christ is a mark of bigotry, while preferring the female Christ (Christa) is a mark of discernment.
- Campaigning for abstinence education is restrictive, while promoting “free love” and revolution is a mark of liberation.
- Not allowing children to be taught about the homosexual lifestyle is a throwback to religious narrow-mindedness, bigotry, and the ultimate negative label, “intolerant,” while teaching students to embrace homosexuality as a healthy lifestyle is a mark of inclusion and tolerance.

These kinds of language games contribute to reorienting the masses to an acceptance of the Postmodern political agenda for changing society.

8.6.5 THE GOAL OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

Postmodernists long for a time when all of society’s ills and abuses will be eliminated and **social justice** will prevail. Richard Rorty elaborates his vision for America: “[Walt] Whitman and [John] Dewey tried to substitute hope for knowledge. They wanted to put shared utopian dreams—dreams of an ideally decent and civilized society—in the place of knowledge of God's Will, Moral Law, the Laws of History, or the Facts of Science . . . As long as we have a functioning political

left, we still have a chance to achieve our country, to make it the country of Whitman's and Dewey's dreams.”

Rorty’s language is idealistic—the goal is nothing less than “an ideally decent and civilized society.” Rorty further develops this idea: “[Whitman and Dewey] wanted utopian America to replace God as the unconditional object of desire. They wanted the struggle for social justice to be the country’s animating principle, the nation’s soul.” Elsewhere Rorty reiterates the desire to substitute “social justice for individual freedom as our country’s principal goal.”

The Postmodern understanding of social justice revolves around the “other.” Derrida’s phrase “the singularity of the Other” and Rorty’s term “otherness” refer to those who are marginalized by society—the poor, unemployed, migrants, Hispanics, blacks, women, gays and lesbians. This is equivalent to the Marxist idea that virtue resides only among the oppressed and forms the foundation for identity politics.

Social justice in the Postmodern sense means giving oppressed groups their due in society. Oppressed groups have traditionally been identified according to their race, sex, or gender as well as their economic level. To achieve economic equality requires governmental redistribution of wealth—take from the rich and give to the poor—a common theme among leftists. Rorty refers to Dewey’s utopian dream, and while Dewey was not a Postmodernist, Rorty draws from Dewey’s pragmatism to express his own political hopes. In that light, it is noteworthy that Dewey was himself the head of the League for Industrial Democracy, the American counterpart to the British Fabian Society, a socialistic organization founded in 1883. Both of these organizations attempted to influence their governments toward socialism.

8.6.6 CONCLUSION

To achieve their vision for the West, Postmodernists must dismantle the present socio-political-economic system, replacing the foundational ideas of individual liberty and the rule of law based on God’s moral order with the concepts of identity politics and social justice.

Postmodern Economics

“It is possible to choose (and to persuade others of the advantages of) socialism over capitalism.” — **DAVID F. RUCCIO AND JACK AMARIGLIO**

“Just about the only constructive suggestion Marx made, the abolition of private property, has been tried. It did not work.”

—**RICHARD RORTY**

9.6.1 INTRODUCTION

The quotations above by Rorty and Ruccio and Amariglio illustrate one of the hurdles to understanding Postmodern economics—a lack of consensus among Postmodernists. Another hurdle is that Postmodernists tend not to use traditional language associated with economics—wages, pensions, interest rates, inflation, Social Security, retirement, etc. Instead, they use obscure words and phrases such as fragmentation, differentiation, chronology, pastiche, anti-foundationalism, and pluralism. More terminology that obscures meaning includes “the undecidability of meaning, the textuality of discursivity of knowledge, the inconceivability of pure ‘presence,’ the irrelevance of intention, the insuperability of authenticity, the impossibility of representation, the celebration of play, difference, plurality, chance, inconsequence, and marginality.”

Confusion even surrounds the meaning of the word *person* in Postmodern economic terms. Postmodern economists Ruccio and Amariglio, authors of *Postmodern Moments in Modern Economics*, explain, “The Postmodern condition opens up a very different research agenda for economic scientists should they choose to disown (what many regard as a necessary fiction) the unified self and move, instead to a fiction supposedly more in tune with contemporary reality, the decentered self.”

Ruccio and Amariglio expose the heart of Postmodern economics—and to understand them, we must define *unified self* and *decentered self* and why they are said to be *fictions*.

9.6.2 THE BASIC ECONOMIC UNIT: THE DECENTERED SELF

Economics flows from our understanding of the human person. Postmodern psychology sees human beings as fictions—meaning there is no unified, rational self and no permanent understanding of who we are. Rather, what we call human beings Postmodernists call social constructions.

Ruccio and Amariglio say there is “no singular and unique ‘I.’” In other words, there is no self-identity and no permanent soul or mind. Postmodernists refer to human beings not as persons, but as subjects, bodies, or units. *Person* suggests the existence of a *singular and unique I* who possesses a personality or *human nature*. To Postmodernists, there is no human nature. There is only an ever evolving, highly sexual, social animal with multiple subjective interests crying out for recognition and acceptance. Ruccio and Amariglio admit they have “no interest in determining or representing what the body [subject] ‘really’ looks like.”

Our common understanding of *self* corresponds to our perception of *gender* and *sex*. However, in the Postmodern view, these two terms are not synonymous. Being born with a male or female anatomy thus does not make us *male* or *female* because these concepts are socially constructed fictions. Ruccio and Amariglio say, “Regardless of biological sex,” human beings can be “gendered in different ways.” Thus, according to the Postmodernist way of seeing things, there are no longer only two sexes—male and female—but a multiplicity of genders, including, but not limited to, heterosexual, homosexual, bi-sexual, trans-sexual, etc. All sexualities are socially and economically constructed and must be considered in any emerging economic theory and practice.

One of the major goals of Postmodern economics is to eliminate the distinction between men and women, a distinction that has been “inculcated by an oppressive patriarchal society.” The goal is to eliminate patriarchal society itself and elevate the economic realities of gendered subjects (women, homosexuals, bisexuals, etc.). The goal includes creating more equitable work environments for all subjects in fields that are viewed to be presently monopolized by heterosexual males—the military and the clergy, for example.

Postmodern economics is built on several interlocking concepts. First, every subject’s perception of self is shaped by the surrounding culture. Second, these perceptions are *fictions* in the

sense that they are stories we have been told by our society. Third, these stories do not correspond to anything objective or eternal, and they vary from culture to culture and over time.

9.6.3 SOCIALISM OVER CAPITALISM

Building on the conviction that human *units* are interchangeable, Postmodernists critique our understanding of gender in Western culture as oppressive and outmoded. Historically, Western economic systems were based on a male-dominated society. Men are said to have had an upper hand because they constructed society and its corresponding economic structure to their advantage. Therefore, in order to create a society with equal opportunities for all subjects, this male-dominated system must be dismantled. Since men will not willingly relinquish their economic power to women and the poor, the government must intervene to see that economic justice is available to all. Socialism, or a state-planned economy, is such an intervention.

Postmodernists thus denounce male-dominated capitalism because it produces “one-sided” individuals who lack the ability to perceive the whole. Socialism, by contrast, “allows potentially all of its members to see the whole.” In other words, capitalism speaks primarily to heterosexual maleness, while socialism speaks to the “total” decentered subjects of numerous genders with its “many different subjectivities simultaneously none of which is given privilege as representing the subject’s real essence, whether natural or historical . . . and without a goal or end to which they are moving.”

Some Postmodernists prefer to replace the term *socialism* with *everyday economics*. An older term is *collectivism*. Whatever name is used, there is a consistent denunciation of capitalism, while Postmodernists criticize in several ways: 1) “profits seem to have a higher priority than people; 2) stress on workers is grueling; and 3) U. S. citizens are being fleeced by banks and pharmaceutical companies and utilities and energy companies and HMOs and big, international companies in general [numbers added].”

Stephen Hicks provides perspective to the Postmodern view of economics: “Postmodern thinkers inherit an intellectual tradition that has seen the defeat of all of its major hopes, but there was always socialism. As bad as the philosophical universe became in metaphysics, epistemology, and the study of human nature, there was still the vision of an ethical and political order that would transcend everything and create the beautiful collectivist society.”

9.6.4 INTERVENTIONISM OVER SOCIALISM

While many Postmodernists advocate a whole-hearted socialist agenda, others are critical of how socialism has been implemented in the past. Some Postmodern theorists go so far as to claim that Postmodernism is “fueled by the failure of Marxian-inspired State socialism.” In this regard, Mills writes that Foucault reacted against “. . . the purely economic and State-centered focus [of socialism and nationalism] . . . stressing that power needs to be reconceptualized and the role of the State, and the function of the economic, need a radical revisioning.” Toward the end of his life, Foucault even began encouraging his students to read “libertarian authors on the right like Friedrich A. Hayek and Ludwig von Mises.”

Richard Rorty looked at the history of socialism and came to the conclusion that, practically speaking, it was a failure. Rorty writes, “Just about the only constructive suggestion Marx made, the abolition of private property, has been tried. It did not work.”

While the utopian promise of socialism has much emotional appeal, the actual results where socialism has been implemented were increased poverty and greater class division, in addition to the

millions of citizens slaughtered in the attempt to maintain a state-run monopoly. Rorty criticizes socialism and offers an alternative. He writes, “Most people on my side of this . . . cultural war have given up on socialism in light of the history of nationalization enterprises and central planning in Central and Eastern Europe. We are willing to grant that welfare-state capitalism is the best we can hope for. Most of us who were brought up Trotskyite now feel forced to admit that Lenin and Trotsky did more harm than good.”

Rorty is suggesting that an interventionist approach to economics works best. **Interventionism** is not a totally state-planned economy nor a completely free market economy, but a combination of the two, where the state plays a role in redistributing wealth created in a partially or mostly free market environment. Rorty refers to this as *welfare-state capitalism*.

While most Postmodernists repudiate any references to purpose or goals, Rorty is different. He believes that economic theory should have the goal of alleviating human suffering. Rorty is so committed to this goal that he calls it the “transcultural imperative.” He sees an interventionist economy as the best way to decrease human suffering. As he told a college audience in 1999, “The non-West has a lot of justified complaints to make about the West, but it does owe a lot to Western ingenuity. The West is good at coming up with devices for lessening human suffering . . . These devices are used to prevent the strong from having their way with the weak and, thereby, to prevent the weak from suffering as much as they would have otherwise.”

9.6.5 THE NEED FOR EXPERIMENTATION

Other Postmodernists, however, believe Rorty is too optimistic. They are convinced that every economic system to date has failed in one way or another. Iain Grant writes, “. . . if the tools of the past—Marxism, the Enlightenment project, market liberalism and so on—have been tried and found wanting, then [as Lyotard suggested] experiment is demanded.” Here, Postmodernists acknowledge that all economic theories have failed, and therefore the best we can do is keep experimenting as we go. Maybe, by chance, we will invent some new economic idea that will better serve the people. Yet Postmodernists offer no concrete alternative to build upon. Epstein observes correctly that “one reason that Postmodernism has taken hold so widely is that it is much easier to be critical than to present a positive vision.”

Even Ruccio and Amariglio seem to have low expectations of Postmodern *everyday economics*. They say, “We don’t envision (or for that matter, seek to promote) a separate Postmodern economic theory.” In fact, they are “hesitant to argue that Postmodernism shows the way forward,” and are content with conversations and encounters “rather than a new [economic] home.” Since there is no *truth* about the *real* world or the *nature* of humanity, it is hard to arrive at a *correct* view of economics. Such is the Postmodern dilemma.

9.6.6 CONCLUSION

Postmodern economics is a mixed bag of conflicting ideas and theories. While most Postmodernists favor socialism, others opt for some milder form of interventionism. Still others harshly critique both socialism and capitalism, and some are critical of *all* economic theories.

In the final analysis, while Postmodernists are not in total agreement in every detail, they are committed to the leftist side of the economic spectrum, favoring, to varying degrees, some form of government intervention. This intervention may be more overt, as with Ruccio and Amariglio, or less so, as with Rorty. But in either case, there is agreement that capitalism is the enemy of social justice. Yet based on the Postmodern aversion to metanarratives, most hesitate to offer concrete

solutions, preferring instead to experiment with some degree of socialism for an economic alternative that best suits an ever-changing social structure.

Postmodern History

“I am well aware that I have never written anything but fictions. I do not mean to say, however, that truth is therefore absent. It seems to me that the possibility exists for fiction to function in truth. One ‘fictions’ history on the basis of a political reality that makes it true, one ‘fictions’ a politics not yet in existence on the basis of a historical truth.”

— MICHEL

FOUCAULT

10.6.1 INTRODUCTION

The Postmodern approach to history differs dramatically from that of all other worldviews. For example, a Christian worldview sees history as the grand unfolding of God’s divine plan to redeem a fallen humanity (see Paul’s speech in Acts 17). In contrast, the more radical Postmodernists see no ultimate purpose in history, advocating instead a *nihilist* perspective. Less radical Postmodernists advocate the view that history is what we make of it. They believe that historical facts are inaccessible, leaving the historian to his or her imagination and ideological bent to reconstruct what happened in the past.

Postmodernists use the term **historicism** to describe the view that all questions must be settled within the cultural and social context in which they are raised. Both Lacan and Foucault argue that each historical period has its own knowledge system and individuals are unavoidably entangled within these systems. Answers to life’s questions cannot be found by appealing to some external truth, but only to the norms and forms within each culture that phrase the question.

10.6.2 HISTORY AS FICTION

The traditional approach to history holds that by sifting through the evidence at hand (texts, artifacts, etc.), we may arrive at a more or less accurate understanding of past events and their significance. This means that not all descriptions of history are equally valid. Some accounts may be more true to the actual events than others. As new information comes to light, any narrative of history could be revised or supplemented.

However, most Postmodernists doubt that an accurate telling of the past is possible because they blur the difference between fact and fiction—some even claim that *all* historical accounts are fiction. Foucault is one of the originators of this Postmodern approach to history, which offers a profound challenge to the norm. Professor John Coffey, in a biography of Foucault, provides insight into how Foucault’s background influenced his views on history:

In 1948 Michel Foucault attempted to commit suicide. He was at the time a student at the elite Parisian university, the Ecole Normale. The resident doctor there had little

doubt about the source of the young man's distress. Foucault appeared to be racked with guilt over his frequent nocturnal visits to the illegal gay bars of the French capital. His father, a strict disciplinarian who had previously sent his son to the most regimented Catholic school he could find, arranged for Michel to be admitted to a psychiatric hospital for evaluation. Yet Foucault remained obsessed with death, joked about hanging himself and made further attempts to end his own life. This youthful experience of himself as homosexual, suicidal and mentally disturbed proved decisive for Foucault's intellectual development. The subject matter of many of his later books arose from his own experience—*Madness and Civilization* (1961), *The Birth of the Clinic* (1963), *Discipline and Punish* (1975), and *The History of Sexuality* (3 Vols. 1976-1984) all dwell on topics of deep personal concern to their author. Foucault's intellectual career was to be a lifelong crusade on behalf of those whom society labeled, marginalized, incarcerated and suppressed.

Thus Foucault was intent on liberating himself and others from all constraints: theological, moral, and social. Mark Poster observes, "Foucault offers a new way of thinking about history, writing history and deploying history in current political struggles. Foucault is an anti-historian, one who in writing history, threatens every canon of the craft." Indeed, one of Foucault's major theses was that *truth* and *knowledge* were nothing other than claims to power.

For Foucault, truth and knowledge were constructions we offer to persuade others. They need not correspond to reality, for we construct our own reality in such a way as to give us power over others. With this in mind, his admission in *Knowledge/Power* is revealing: "I am well aware that I have never written anything but fictions. I do not mean to say, however, that truth is therefore absent. It seems to me that the possibility exists for fiction to function in truth, for a fictional discourse to induce effects of truth, and for bringing it about that a true discourse engenders or 'manufactures' something that does not as yet exist, that it 'fictions' it. One 'fictions' history on the basis of a political reality that makes it true, one 'fictions' a politics not yet in existence on the basis of a historical truth."

10.6.3 REVISING HISTORY

While the history of humanity itself may not have a purpose, the writing of historical accounts does. Resonating with Foucault's approach to history is the view that the writing of history should promote an ideology. If, as Foucault declares, a claim to knowledge really is nothing but an attempt to overpower others, then retelling history serves the purpose of gaining power for some repressed group.

Thus, according to the Postmodern condition the discipline of history has turned away from the study of significant individuals and the struggles between nations to focus on social groups and institutions. Tom Dixon writes, "Social historians are often driven by activist goals. Historical research becomes not an attempt to understand the past but a propaganda tool for use in modern political and social power struggles." Dixon also notes, "Postmodern cultural historians consider bias unavoidable in whole or even in part. As a result we see a growing willingness to arrange and edit facts in a way that supports the message of particular historians." This is precisely where the line between recording history and *revising* history is crossed.

This rewriting of the past to serve a purpose, known as **revisionist history**, contributes to empowering oppressed social minorities. Thus feminist histories attempt to expose a male-dominated, patriarchal past and point the way for empowering women. Likewise, homosexual histories are put forward (in response to homophobic repressions) to provide equality for

homosexuals. Black histories emphasize the horrors of slavery to redress past maltreatment of African Americans. Every repressed group—minorities of all colors, ethnicities, nationalities, and sexualities—has an injustice that must be exposed in order to rectify the abuses of the past.

Take as one example Rigoberta Menchu, who won the Nobel Prize in 1992 for her autobiography, *I, Rigoberta Menchu: An Indian Woman in Guatemala*. Her book became an instant success on college campuses, where professors used her story to demonstrate the plight of the impoverished Guatemalans languishing under government death squads. Menchu maintains that she personally witnessed the Guatemalan army burn her brother alive in her town's public square. However, when doctoral student David Stoll went to Guatemala to verify Menchu's story, he discovered no villager had a memory of such a slaughter by the Guatemalan Army. In fact, the key struggle in the book, between her father and a light-skinned landowner, was actually an argument between her father and his in-laws.

As it turns out, Menchu had told her story to French leftist Elisabeth Burgos-Debray, who actually wrote the autobiography, misrepresenting many "facts" in her book. Burgos-Debray claimed that Menchu, as a female, was denied school, yet she actually attended two Catholic boarding schools through seventh grade. The book states that she worked on a plantation under horrible conditions, yet she never set foot on a plantation as a child. Also, the author claimed that the local villagers saw the Marxist guerrillas as liberators, when in actuality the villagers were terrified of them.

Kevin J. Kelley comments, "U. S. leftists who give his [Stoll's] arguments a full hearing—and who have not been deafened by their own dogma—will find Stoll's analysis difficult to dismiss." Yet, in response to Stoll's research, Professor Marjorie Agosin of Wellesley College stated bluntly, "Whether her book is true or not, I don't care. We should teach our students about the brutality of the Guatemalan military and the U.S. financing of it." Ideology therefore trumps integrity.

Some feminist historians assert that men cannot write histories of women, first because men simply cannot understand women, and second because men have masculine ideologies and women have feminine ideologies. The same is said about a person attempting to write the history of a different race. It cannot be done since all people are presumed to be under a cloud of racial bias.

10.6.4 MARXIST DERIVATIVES AND DEPARTURE

A Postmodernist approach to history in some ways mimics Marxism, which is understandable since the fountainheads of Postmodernism have Marxism in their intellectual genealogies. A distinct residue of Marxist critique remains in their work, providing them with the dichotomizing perspective so blatant in the Marxist vision of class struggle. Derrida admits that his deconstruction is a radicalization "within the tradition of a certain Marxism, in a certain spirit of Marxism."

Specifically the Postmodern historian mimics Marxist understanding of the ideological nature of writing history. While Marxists focus on the proletariat rising against the bourgeoisies, Postmodernists focus on one gender, race, or socially identifiable group in a struggle for dominion over another. Gene Veith explains, "Post-Marxist radicalism constructs new revolutionary ideologies by replacing Marx's concern for the oppressed working class with other oppressed groups (blacks, women, gays). Status and moral legitimacy come from being 'excluded from power.' The victim has the favored role. . . . To be black, female or gay is to enjoy a sort of secular sainthood. But even these categories are segmenting into ever-smaller sects of victim hood." Such an approach does little to draw society together toward harmonious civility. Rather, it engenders a new tribalism, pitting every group against the other in an attempt to gain moral standing by becoming the greatest victim.

One significant difference between Postmodernist and Marxist approaches to history concerns whether history has an inherent meaning. Marxists advocate *historical materialism*, complete with the vision that human history eventually will arrive at a purely communistic (i.e., classless) society. In a similar way Secular Humanists hope for evolutionary progress throughout history and Cosmic Humanists spiritualize those evolutionary hopes for bringing about a “New Age.” But the Postmodernist view of history is distinctly *ateleological* (i.e., without a purpose). For them, mankind is an evolving animal but not necessarily at the top of the species list. *Homo sapiens* are simply one among many species. We have arrived at this point in evolutionary history by chance, not design, and therefore have no purpose or destiny.

A world without meaning or purpose results in nihilism. Stephen Hicks suggests that Derrida clearly understood the kind of world Postmodernism was bringing and declared his intention not to be among those who let their queasiness get the better of them. Derrida proclaimed that Postmodernists “do not turn their eyes away” when faced with the prospect that ours is “the species of the nonspecies, in the formless, mute, infant, and terrifying form of monstrosity.” This is a strong rejection of a meaningful past. Given a naturalistic approach to life, one without the bold assertions of Marxism or the sentimental hopefulness of Humanism, a Postmodern view of history is devoid of ultimate meaning or purpose.

10.6.5 CONCLUSION

Because ideas have consequences, we cannot afford to overlook the consequences of the more radical Postmodern approaches to history. If history is mere fiction, or even largely so, then those who deny, for example, the Nazi holocaust are validated in their attempts to diminish the numbers of Jews imprisoned, tortured, starved, shot, cremated, or buried in mass graves. Indeed, if history is (largely) fiction, then Mother Teresa and Adolph Hitler cannot be used as examples of good and evil. There are no “facts.” There are only various degrees of fiction.

Conclusion

11.5.1 INTRODUCTION

In this section we provide an overall critique of Postmodernism. Atheism and evolution are addressed in the critique on Secular Humanism and Marxism and are not repeated here. While we offer some assessment within several of the Postmodern worldview disciplines, we provide an in-depth critique. As with the other worldviews, we focus on the major themes that are the distinguishing features of this worldview. For Postmodernism, these primary areas are philosophy (the nature of reality and truth), politics, and history.

11.5.2 SUBJECTIVE TRUTH, DECONSTRUCTION, AND ANTI-REALISM

Postmodernists most likely have difficulty living with their view of reality. They claim that “reality” is constructed by language. On one level, the statement “the train is coming” may convey a multitude of interpretations to different people. To some it may even simulate a train. But if people

fail to get off the tracks, the result of their interpretation could prove fatal because there are indeed objective, non-verbal referents to words and texts. Real life is not open to infinite interpretations. At any particular moment in time, either a train is coming down the track or a train is not coming down the track. This real world fact is not a matter of our personal interpretation. Regardless of the word games Postmodernists play, there is an actual reality! Postmodernists have a hard time escaping the correspondence theory of truth.

For example, Postmodernist Melville Herskovits writes, “Even the facts of the physical world are discerned through the enculturative screen, so that the perception of time, distance, weight, size, and other 'realities' is mediated by the conventions of any group.” To which Hadley Arkes responds, “Happily for us all, this argument is fatally vulnerable to the recognition, accessible to the educated, the uneducated—and even, at times, to the overeducated—that there is a material world out there. That world happens to be filled with facts [truths] that do not depend for their existence as facts on the 'experience' or the subjective 'perceptions' of individuals. Even if the 'enculturative screen' of Jersey City affected its natives with fanciful 'perceptions' of 'distance,' the actual distance between Jersey City and Paris is very likely to remain the same.”

Or consider the well-worn Postmodern phrase, “That’s just *your* interpretation.” As D. A. Carson points out, there is a problem with this view. Carson says he has never met a deconstructionist who would be pleased if a reviewer misinterpreted his work. He notes, “. . . in practice deconstructionists implicitly link their own texts with their own intentions.” In other words, deconstructionists believe in authorial intent when they are the authors, but deny authorial intent when it comes to works by others!

Likewise, we recognize a dilemma with the popular Postmodern slogan, “That may be true for you but not for me.” If the person making that statement means that it applies only to him, than who cares what he says. He is only talking to himself! On the other hand, if the person means to apply his statement also to *you*, then you can respond, “I get the impression that you think I should believe what you just said. If that is the case, why are you trying to impose your concept of what is true on me?” Either way, the Postmodernist has made a statement he cannot live with himself. It is a self-defeating position, one that is totally absurd. If you try to apply the Postmodernist view of truth to day-to-day life, the result is a total breakdown in the ability to communicate.

11.5.3 WHO DECIDES?

Another serious problem arises from a Postmodern philosophy of language. If each community determines what is true through its use of language, which community gets to decide between rival communities when it comes to conflicting ideas (such as suttee, the Hindu practice of burning a widow on her deceased husband’s pyre, exterminating the Jewish race, or abolishing private ownership of property). Since no community can claim to be “right” on any of these or other issues, the result is an increased competition for which group will dominate the others. We are witnessing this kind of escalation between warring factions in many areas of society, from the college campus to the political arena to the international scene.

Paul Kurtz elaborates on this problem. He describes Postmodernism as a nihilistic “philosophical-literary movement,” meaning that since objective truth does not exist, we can neither know nor communicate anything. To balance the idea that objective truth is unknowable, Kurtz claims that science offers “reasonably objective standards for judging its truth claims.” He continues, “Science has become a universal language, speaking to all men and women no matter what their cultural backgrounds.”

While we agree with Kurtz that scientific knowledge can lead to truth concerning the physical universe, our Biblical Christian philosophy of knowledge also emphasizes revealed truth as a means for understanding other truths, including our relationship to God.

The negative consequences of a Postmodern approach to language cannot be overstated. For a telling example of applying deconstruction to law, go back to 1973. In handing down their decision in the *Roe v Wade* case, the majority of the Supreme Court chose to look at the Constitution as a “living document”—that is, open to many interpretations (polysemy). As a result, they invented new meanings from the original text—meanings that are not openly stated—and came up with a novel interpretation regarding a woman’s reproductive rights. The consequence of their decision is that, since 1973, over 40 million unborn children have been murdered at the request of their mothers.

Postmodernists are correct about one thing—interpretation is important. Confucius says, “When words lose their meanings, people lose their freedom.” In reality, however, when words lose their meaning, people lose not only their freedom, but their lives!

11.5.4 THE TRUTH ABOUT TRUTH

In stark contrast to Postmodern ideas that language is fluid and open to varying interpretations, the Christian worldview says that objective truth exists. In contrast to Postmodern ideas that our particular community determines truth, nearly everything about Christianity is *universal* in scope and application. God created the whole universe, including men and women. Sin is a *universal* condition affecting every human being. God loved the *whole world*, including every human being. Christ died for the sins of the *whole world*, not just one or two particular communities. Christians are to love God with all their heart and mind and their fellow human beings around the *whole world*.

God chose to communicate the truth about Himself and His world through words contained in the Scriptures along with the language of the heavens (Psalm 19). God’s words do not depend upon a reader’s interpretation. Instead, the reader is to interpret the Bible according to God’s intention. The Apostle Peter is clear when he writes, “Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:19–21).

To correctly understand the meaning of any text of Scripture, we should heed Paul’s advice to Timothy: “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15). By acknowledging that God has communicated in language true things about the real world, and by diligently studying the Bible, you can know the truth that sets you free (John 8:32).

11.5.5 PROGRESSIVE POLITICS AND SOCIAL INJUSTICE

Postmodernists seem to contradict themselves in identifying their political stance. An assessment of the Postmodernist approach to politics reveals a glaring contradiction. While Foucault maintains a seeming detachment regarding various political systems and says he is all over the political checkerboard, he undeniably holds leftist political views. Postmodernists may refer to their views as *progressive*, and some, like Rorty, may be more “moderate” than others, but the fact remains that they are all huddled together on the political left. Foucault stated publicly, “When the proletariat takes power, it may be quite possible that the proletariat will exert toward the classes over which it has triumphed a violent, dictatorial, and even bloody power. I can’t see what objection could possibly be made to this.”

Another difficulty is that Postmodernists fail to act consistently with their worldview. On the one hand, they say no metanarrative can capture the essence of truth. Yet, at the same time they say that a leftist vision of social justice is “right” for the world. Denying all metanarratives, how do they know their view is correct? Why do they try to rescue the oppressed? Why is oppression wrong? Why do they try to impose their views on others? These are questions Postmodernists cannot answer according to their own view of reality and truth. The best they can say is “We don’t like it.”

Although they do not know it, their desire to change the plight of the oppressed is an appeal to something basic, a sense of the moral order. Only a biblical worldview can answer the question of why Postmodernists sense that everyone should be treated fairly. It is because God has written on their hearts the requirements of His moral law (Romans 2:14–15). In reality, when a Postmodernist calls for justice or fairness, he is borrowing this idea from a Christian worldview and trying to make it fit into his own, since there is no such thing as fairness found within his own worldview.

When it comes to social justice, Postmodernists begin with the wrong theology (atheism), which leads to a wrong philosophy (anti-realism), which in turn results in a wrong understanding of human nature (we are a product of social forces). Therefore, Postmodernists fall into a badly aimed approach to politics—trying to force an outward change upon society under the guise of social justice.

Those who invest in learning from history and observing human nature are aware of problems inherent in the quest for social justice. Milton Friedman wrote, “A society that puts equality—in the sense of equality of outcome—ahead of freedom will end up with neither equality nor freedom. The use of force to achieve equality will destroy freedom, and the force, introduced for good purposes, will end up in the hands of people who use it to promote their own interests.”

Thomas Sowell refers to this desire for the perfect society as “The Quest for Cosmic Justice.” Sowell explains that traditionally, justice is “characteristic of a *process*.” He then illustrates his point: “A defendant in a criminal case would be said to have received justice if the trial were conducted as it should be, under fair rules and with the judge and jury being impartial. After such a trial, it could be said that ‘justice was done’—regardless of whether the outcome was an acquittal or an execution.”

In contrast to the traditional definition of justice, the Postmodern concept of social justice seeks to “eliminate underserved disadvantages for selected groups.” This they consider “fair.” Sowell explains, “Note how the word ‘fair’ has an entirely different meaning in this context. Cosmic [social] justice is not about the rules of the game. It is about putting particular segments of society in the position that they would have been in but for some undeserved misfortune. This conception of fairness requires that third parties must wield the power to control outcomes, over-riding rules, standards, or the preferences of other people.”

Sowell points out that social justice can never be achieved because it demands vastly more knowledge than anyone has available. In reality, every individual has advantages or disadvantages in life. Some have beauty but lack intelligence, others are born into wealth but lack emotional stability, while others may have athletic ability but are crippled by a quick temper. The point is, how can anyone else be in a position to judge which advantages should be disregarded and which disadvantages should be remedied? The answer is that no one possesses the necessary insight. There are too many variables. Therefore, the idea that government can bring about a forced equality among all people is unreasonable and unattainable.

Another problem with social justice is that it fails to consider the overall cost to society as a whole. Social justice focuses on one segment of the population but “disregards the interests of others who are not the immediate focus of discussion, but who nevertheless pay the price of the decisions made.”

For example, when a certain class of students is given preference for admittance to college in spite of low test scores, the additional cost to the college for providing scholarships to students who will eventually drop out is being overlooked. Other groups not considered in the decision are the alumni supporting their school with donations for such scholarships, as well as other students who were better qualified academically but not admitted. The result is not fairness but further state-sanctioned “unfairness.” As former radical David Horowitz writes, “The regime of social justice, of which the Left dreams, is a regime that by its very nature must crush individual freedom.”

11.5.6 FAITH-BASED JUSTICE

When it comes to helping the poor, while a worthy goal, Socialism’s vision of economic equality is a false hope. History is replete with the failed attempts of such schemes. Nowhere has socialism been tried that it succeeded. That is because the idea is based on a wrong psychology, one that assumes that humanity is basically good. On the other hand, acknowledging our sinfulness leads to a free market economy that provides the greatest amount of opportunity and economic progress. Furthermore, helping the poor is accomplished through actions, not mere words. Richard John Neuhaus offers a critique of Postmodern rhetoric in contrast to the actions of faith-based groups: “In cities across the country and generally under conservative auspices, such street-level programs of personal and community renewal are rapidly multiplying. Nothing comparable is happening on the left.” In other words, “faith-based organizations” (generally religious and conservative in nature) are helping the poor, families with no father, and communities overrun with drugs and crime. Postmodern organizations are few and far behind in these efforts to practice what they preach.

The founders of Western civilization rejected the utopian vision of social justice and opted instead for traditional justice. Specifically, those who formed the United States sought to create a nation based on realistic ideals—individual liberty and opportunity. Because they also understood our sinful nature, they sought to put “chains” (their term) around government to check its tendency to abuse power. They wrote the ultimate check on the politics of power into the Declaration of Independence—an appeal to the “laws of nature and Nature’s God” as well as the opening phrase of the Constitution: “We, the people . . .” Their wisdom placed political power ultimately in the hands of the citizens, who themselves were trained by Christian religion and biblical morality. If we do not take our responsibility seriously, then we have only ourselves to blame when we lose our liberty to those who would seek to impose their brand of social justice on us.

Yet, the task at times seems overwhelming. What can we do to make a difference? J.R.R. Tolkien provides an answer. In a scene from *The Two Towers*, Pippin and Merry entreat the peace-loving Ents (ancient trees that walk and talk) to join the battle against the forces of the evil Sauron. When the trees refuse, Pippin tries to solace Merry by saying, “Maybe Treebeard is right. We don’t belong here, Merry. This is too big for us. What can we do in the end? We’ve got the Shire. Maybe we should go home.” Merry replies with desperation in his voice, “The fires of Isengard will spread, and the woods of Tribu and Buckland will burn. And all that was once great and good in this world will be gone.”

What Merry understood is a lesson for contemporary Christians. If we fail to act while we still have the freedom to speak our minds, there will come a day when the power-plays of political correctness will eliminate our liberties, and all that was once “great and good” about Western civilization will be gone. The land of the free will cease to exist.

11.5.7 WHAT CAN WE KNOW ABOUT HISTORY?

Postmodernists claim that all historical accounts are merely fictions created for a political purpose and that all historians are biased, confined within their own social setting. Historians, of course, have a worldview, some vision of political improvement, and a host of emotional investments. This always has been the case, and it is well known. Dixon writes, "In earlier times, historians acknowledged and resisted personal bias as antithetical to good historical research."

Nevertheless, some historical events have been grossly mischaracterized, such as when some claimed that the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, were a Jewish plot to encourage America to pursue a more aggressive policy against Muslims. Clearly, history can be both misidentified as well as mischaracterized. While it is true that some historians have misconstrued history to convince others of a certain perspective of past events, the fact that we can even *know* this has occurred illustrates that history is not entirely inaccessible. That narratives of the past can be *corrected* illustrates that history should not be equated with fictional accounts such as imaginative novels.

Should we accept the Postmodern feminist approach to history that claims everyone has an insurmountable bias? The problem here is that the feminist historian's ideology is very much like the feminists' objections to pro-life arguments against abortion. When confronting a man who is pro-life, feminists decry, "But you're a man!" It is as though our gender determines the legitimacy of our argument. On the other hand, if a woman presents a similar pro-life argument, is she taken seriously? No! Feminists retort that such women are intellectually incarcerated by the dominant male ideology. Pro-life women are considered dupes, pawns in the struggle for male dominance. To assert that only participants in particular groups can write the histories of those groups is to imply that the oppressed can never write the histories of their oppressors. Yet, such histories would be very appropriate, revealing what the oppressors might otherwise overlook as mundane.

Today, many people are ignorant of history, which plays into the hands of film-makers with particular agendas. By weaving together fact and fiction in entertaining ways, with engaging story-lines and attractive actors, screenwriters, directors, and producers can manipulate the understanding of the average viewer because most are ill equipped to sort out historical events from imaginative interpretations. Films such as *Braveheart*, *Good Night and Good Luck*, *The Last Temptation of Christ*, or *The Da Vinci Code* leave viewers with a compelling story of the past, yet with no way to decipher where history ends and embellishment begins.

It goes without saying that we should not believe everything we read or see. We must retain a certain degree of skepticism as we listen to various claims, for not all claimants intend to tell the truth. This is especially true in our Postmodern world, where ideology is considered more important than telling the truth.

It is also clear that individuals, communities, and governments have misconstrued history for the purpose of either gaining power or covering up their misdeeds. For example, the former Soviet Union controlled the writing of textbooks and taught children that Joseph Stalin was the epitome of virtue when in reality he was a mass murderer. The truth was discovered when eyewitnesses came forward speaking of the atrocities and when the mass graves of the slaughtered were found. Continued research into history revealed the truth about Stalin, Lenin, Mao Tse-Tung, Pol Pot, and others.

Revelations of truth concerning Stalin and others are not mere social constructions or the political biases of present-day historians. Rather they form the consensus of scholarly reflection based on the assumption that we can have access to truth about the past. While this is something that Postmodernists are not willing to admit, it is the only sensible approach to understanding history.