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POSTMODERNISM – WHAT IS IT?[1]

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"The times they are a-changin'," Bob Dylan sang in 1964. This message is still appropriate today -- at least Dylan apparently thinks so. He included the song on at least three different albums released in the past decade. The deep-seated intuition that change is in the air -- felt by peoples of diverse visions and convictions -- lies at the heart of the contemporary interest in postmodernism.

One might think that the question in this essay's title, "Postmodernism – What Is It?" would be easy to answer. After all, an excess of materials has been offered -- both to academics and the general public -- under the label "postmodern." Actually, however, answering the question, "What is postmodernism?" proves to be difficult. The main reason for this difficulty is that some notions flying under the postmodern flag oppose or contradict other notions under the same banner. When opposite or contradictory ideas get proposed as postmodern, how does one decide which is authentic? What is postmodernism?

Exposing what is not meant by postmodernism may be helpful when trying to define this word. Those who speak of "the postmodern era" do not usually mean a future time beyond what is contemporary or immediate. In other words, "modern" and "now" are not synonymous. Postmodernists are not concerned with transcending the temporal present. Rather, "modernity" refers to various ways of existing, assorted ideas and beliefs, or particular paradigms of thought. And "postmodernity" has something to do with getting beyond these modern ways, ideas, and paradigms.[2]

I define postmodernism, then, as the sentiment that the modern paradigm must be transcended. The times they are a-changin', and, according to postmodernists, a change from modernity is here. Exactly *how* one should go beyond the modern and *what* distinguishes modernity from postmodernity, however, is widely disputed.

Some are surprised to find that a variety of postmodernisms currently vie for ascendancy in contemporary culture and scholarship. Unfortunately, individuals often speak of "*the*" postmodern way of looking at some issue, when, in fact, an assortment of postmodern agendas exists.

Because of this diversity, I will attempt to outline briefly, in the remainder of this essay, what I consider the dominant postmodern ideologies arising from and influencing philosophy and theology. My methodology for differentiating between dominant postmodernisms is rather simple. I will attempt to answer two questions of each postmodern perspective: (1) "What ideas or practices does this postmodern tradition believe are modern?" and (2) "What ideas or practices does this tradition contend are postmodern and should be embraced when overcoming the perceived shortcomings of modernity?"

The listener should beware that, when tackling such a monstrous project in such a brief essay, I will be forced to make generalizations. I believe that my generalizations are essentially accurate, however, and I hope that specialists will momentarily set aside technical quibbling and acknowledge the general validity of my broad-brush strokes.

I should also note that I will not be addressing one particular strand of postmodernism that might be called "popular culture postmodernism." This form draws from a variety of experiences, social structures, disciplines, and theories, which results in a kaleidoscope of giberishness and

incoherence. Popular culture postmodernism's one distinguishing characteristic, however, is its underlying attraction to novelty. This postmodernism is fascinated with the current, the latest, and the recent. This tradition is actually not postmodern as I have defined postmodernism above, because it equates postmodernity with mere contemporary innovation or with whatever happens to be in vogue. While this preoccupation with novelty affects philosophy and theology to a degree, its affect is minimal.

Deconstructive Postmodernism

Perhaps the most well-known postmodern tradition is the deconstructionist one. Although a variety of ideas and persons get placed under this umbrella, Jacques Derrida's ideas provide the pulse for deconstructive postmodernism. In fact, no other philosopher's ideas are as readily recognized as "postmodern." Many of Derrida's notions, however, can be correlated with notions proposed more than a century ago by Friedrich Nietzsche.

Among the ideas that Derrida rejects as modern are what he calls "the metaphysics of presence" and "logocentrism." By these terms, he refers to the modern project of basing knowledge and language upon a certain center or sure epistemological foundation. Modernists are incorrect in supposing the existence of a transcendent center, argues Derrida, there is no certain foundation of Truth.

A central postmodern category for Derrida, which he uses when talking about the lack of transcendent center, is "differ`ance." This word combines two infinitives "to differ" and "to defer." Derrida contends that words inevitably defer to subversive meanings, because all words possess meanings different from the meanings the author intends. Differ`ance, which is "the disappearance of any ordinary presence, is *at once* the condition of possibility *and* the condition

of the impossibility of truth."[3] Differànce allows one "to think a writing without presence, without absence, without history, without cause, without *archia*, without *telos*, a writing that absolutely upsets all dialectics, all theology, all teleology, all ontology."[4]

Derrida calls the actual practice of deconstructive philosophy "grammatology." Grammatology is the "vigilant practice of . . . textual division."[5] In a nutshell, the practice of literary deconstruction involves noting words and phrases in a text that undermine the original author's intended meaning. As interpretation and reinterpretation occurs, the reader comes to realize that no foundational, final, or fixed interpretation is available. Words refer to other words, those refer to other words, and those refer to still others; the process has no end. Meaning is found in matrices, but these matrices are finally groundless. The practice of grammatology reveals the emptiness of logocentrism by deconstructing all concepts or norms tied to a center.

Deconstructive postmodernism is not interested in replacing an old system with a better one. It is interested in undermining the metaphysical, epistemological, and linguistic centers presupposed by most philosophies. "Deconstruction does not consist in passing from one concept to another," Derrida says, "but in overturning and displacing a conceptual order, as well as the nonconceptual order with which the conceptual order is articulated."[6] There is no center for meaning, says Derrida, all is discourse. There is no Truth; instead, a multiplicity of voices ring out.

Proponents of deconstructive postmodernism argue that this contemporary option provides many advantages over modern philosophies. Deconstruction provides the means for affirming radical heterogeneity, as opposed to modernism's presupposed homogeneity. Deconstructive postmodernism emphasizes plurality; it rejects hierarchical categories. In doing so, this postmodern tradition calls attention to the other; it calls attention to what was previously

disregarded because marginal. Deferring to the incomprehensible other provides a methodology that is no methodology.

Deconstructive postmodernism is also radically non-foundationalist, because it avers that knowledge amounts to interpretation and is, therefore, entirely subjective. We have no way of being confident that our language or thought corresponds truly with objects beyond ourselves. One result of this assumption, among others, is that history has no fixed meaning; the past is only what we interpret it to be. When humans realize that systems that subjugate and oppress have been grounded upon that which is itself groundless, they can become free to play in our multifarious world.

Much of what deconstructive postmodernism denies has, in the history of philosophy and theology, been the domain of divinity. While Derrida often implies that God does not exist, it should be noted that he does not finally wish to state this. His assertions are meant to denote the impossibility of speaking of any Absolute. One of Derrida's foremost interpreters, John D. Caputo, identifies Derrida variously with the prophetic, the apophatic, the messianic, the apocalyptic, negative theology, and atheism.[7] To identify Derrida exclusively with any one of these traditions would miss the mark. But we come closer to grasping what deconstructive theology entails when we consider the traditions typically thought of as contrary to these that Caputo identifies with Derrida. For example, deconstructive theology opts for a negative theology over a positive one, apophatic theology over rational theology, and atheistic theology over traditional theism.

Despite deconstructive postmodernism's broad appeal, it is not without its share of opponents. Critics contend that deconstruction is inherently negative, and philosophies cannot offer ways to attain well-being without some positive features. Derrida's typical response to such critics is that

their evaluations are based upon the very structures that need displacement (e.g., the valuations of "positive vs. negative").

Critics also sometimes contend that differànce is the methodological center of Derrida's own thought, so that not even Derrida can accomplish what he says must be done. Although Derrida and his interpreters argue otherwise, such counter arguments remain unconvincing to critics, because, in their arguments, deconstructionists utilize the very methods they contend are invalid. It should also be noted that relativism and nihilism haunt deconstructive postmodernism. In order for deconstructionists to evade the sting of these charges, they must suppose that which deconstructive postmodernism seeks to discard. The major line of defense deconstructionists take against their critics is the attempt to undermine the categories that lead to charges of relativism and nihilism.

While this deconstructive thought is the most well-known option available flying a postmodern flag, other options exist that attempt to overcome what antagonists argue are deconstructive postmodernism's glaring deficiencies. In many ways, however, those advancing other postmodern options must show how their own thought is preferable to notions made popular by the deconstuctive tradition before they will attract an audience.

Liberationist Postmodernism

The second postmodern tradition that I consider a dominant contemporary option is comprised of diverse groups and individuals, each with diverse agendas. What unites them -- despite this diversity -- is their shared desire for emancipation. I call this postmodern tradition "liberationist," because each group placed under this umbrella seeks liberation from something they associate

with modernity. The three major forms of liberationist postmodernism upon which I will focus are the feminist, ethnic, and ecological.

In general, postmodern feminism places the issue of gender – specifically, the aspects of femininity -- at the forefront of contemporary discourse. Although modern feminism also addressed gender issues, postmodern feminism typically critiques modern feminists for their acquiescence to modern epistemologies that consider detached and disembodied knowing to be superior. Some postmodern feminists believe that modern epistemologies are based upon the notion that abstract and universalistic thought provides the only or best way of knowing. By contrast, postmodern feminist epistemologies emphasize community, relatedness, and what Michael Polanyi calls "tacit knowledge." In other words, the unique experiences derived from female bodies provide a basis for feminist epistemology.

Drawing upon Jacques Derrida's discussion of logocentrism's vacuity, feminists have also claimed that modern philosophies presuppose a hierarchical structure in which male is superior to female. Modern logocentrism is, as Luce Irigaray would say, a form of phallocentrism. Male is preferred over female, and those traits typically identified with masculinity are considered more valuable than those typically identified with femininity.[8]

One reason that males continue to be privileged, says many postmodern feminists, is that Western linguistic modes privilege masculinity. Many postmodern feminists have appropriated Michel Foucault's work because it highlights this claim. Foucault argues that knowledge and power are linked in modern discourse, which implies that both our knowledge and language can be tyrannical toward women. Language can perpetuate ways of being that imply that women are inferior. Rather than continue the patriarchal ways of modernity, postmodern feminists call upon contemporary people to speak in ways that empower rather than oppress women.

Ethnic postmodernism places culture and race at the forefront of contemporary discourse. Those influenced by this postmodern tradition oppose what they consider modernism's homogenous view of the human. The modernist position implied that biological similarities provide equality and a sense of value to minority groups. Ethnic postmodernists argue, however, that cultural uniqueness establishes one's value and this uniqueness is the basis for one's "voice."

James H. Cone's book, *Martin and Malcolm and America: A Dream or a Nightmare*, illustrates the difference between a modern and postmodern approach to issues of race, gender, and culture. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s dream of the unification of blacks and whites and the equality of all people illustrates the modernist accent upon that which all humans share in common. Malcolm X's dream was, by contrast, "a nightmare." His solution to the Black and White crisis involved an accent upon what was culturally unique to African-Americans, and Malcolm called upon Blacks to withdraw to cultivate African-American identity.[9] One could call Malcolm X's approach "postmodern," then, because it accented diversity and plurality rather than uniformity and sameness.

Ecological postmodernism places the issues of environmental well-being at the forefront of contemporary discourse. This postmodern liberationist tradition identifies modernity with philosophies that deemed the world in need of human domination or an object to be abused. Ecologists argue that a postmodern era must be one that moves beyond modernism's anthropocentrism to a postmodern cosmocentrism; it must move beyond modernism's rampant consumerism to a postmodern era in which humans responsibly nurture the earth and its resources.

As I said in the opening segments of this essay, one of my central agendas is to inquire into theology's impact upon or contribution to postmodernism. Some who adopt the moniker "postmodernist" have closely identified theology and the dogma of various religious communities with modernism and modernism's oppressive activity. For example, female experiences have been depreciated in the name of modernity's Father God; ethnic minorities have been conquered and slaughtered in the name of modernity's White Man's God; the earth has been raped and debilitated in the name of the God who placed nonhumans under the dominion of humans. Others, however, have argued that theology and religion provide unique resources by which to establish a postmodern response to modernity's anti-liberationist tendencies. God is essentially neither male nor female, say these postmodernists; God opposes the oppressor and sides with the oppressed and marginalized; God regards all creatures as intrinsically valuable and expects humans to treat all creation accordingly. One question yet to be decided is this: How much can or should theology and religion be transformed to accommodate these postmodern concerns?

Although liberationist postmodern thought has drawn from a variety of philosophical movements, this tradition has often been attracted to the most well-known form of postmodernism: deconstructive postmodernism. As we noted previously, deconstructive postmodernism undermines those structures that support oppression while calling attention to those residing at societal boundaries. For those consistently marginalized -- which includes minorities of all stripes -- any postmodern philosophy accentuating the value and concerns of those at the margins is initially attractive.

Some liberation postmodernists are finding, however, that deconstructive postmodernism fails to provide any basis for their own liberationist agenda. Derrida's deconstructive philosophy denies that any values are absolute. The value of liberation, including its theories or practices, cannot

then be legitimately privileged when deconstructive postmodern thought is adopted as one's orienting strategy. Relativism and nihilism subvert attempts to instigate deliverance from oppression. Because of this seemingly insurmountable obstacle, many liberationist postmodernists are looking for alternative postmodern philosophies to give a backbone to their essential concern for emancipation.

Narrative Postmodernism

Whether when sitting with natives around a jungle campfire or lounging comfortably with business executives atop a city skyscraper, we tell stories. The stories that we tell divulge who we are and our perspective on life. The stories we tell and the way in which we tell them arise from a particular point of view. A person's point of view is fashioned by how that person has been raised, what that person has been taught, and whom that person knows. In fact, it is the particular community in which any person dwells that provides the meanings of life. Because of this, the particular stories people tell are but variations of their community's overarching narrative. The foregoing provides a nutshell explanation of narrative postmodernism.

The philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein offers the fundamental notions of narrative postmodernism, and many believe that this postmodern tradition overcomes two forms of modernity. Ironically, Wittgenstein holds the distinction of having his early thought typify one of the modern forms that his later postmodern thought overcomes.

Wittgenstein's earlier thought inspired a group of modern philosophers called the "logical positivists." These scholars attempted to take philosopher David Hume seriously by stating everything through logical propositions that "picture" the world. Because the positivists assumed that the world is made up of independent, elementary facts capable of empirical investigation,

they believed that everything meaningful should be expressible in factual language. To say it another way, meaningful language always possesses a logical form that it shares with the world it pictures. Language, sentences, propositions, etc., that do not correspond positively with the pictured world should be discredited as meaningless. Metaphysical, ethical, and theological statements are listed among those things discredited as nonsense; only logic, mathematics, and the natural sciences provide genuine knowledge. This means, among other things, that any talk about God is meaningless, because God cannot be empirically verified, and purely rational arguments for God's existence (e.g., Anselm's ontological argument) are nothing more than empty tautologies.

The early Wittgenstein and the logical positivists are considered "modern," because a driving force of their work was the search for certainty. This quest for certainty is often identified today as "foundationalism." It was Rene Descartes who sought to tear down everything that could be doubted in order to rebuild again upon indubitable premises. Logical positivists regarded logic, mathematics, and the natural sciences to be the only adequate bricks for a meaningful philosophical structure.

The other modern tradition that narrative postmodern philosophy is said to overcome is actually found both in philosophies labeled "modern" and some philosophies labeled "postmodern." The way of thinking that needs to be transcended considers meaning and truth to be ultimately relative to the individual and, therefore, should be decided entirely by each person. The relativism that emerges from this form of isolated individualism stands, according to narrative postmodernists, as modernity's foul invention.

At the heart of Wittgenstein's later philosophy, which provides the basis for his narrative postmodernism alternative, are concepts he designates "language games" and "forms of

life."[10] Narrative postmodernism argues that many kinds of meaningful sentences exist, but the meaning of these sentences is found in, and arises out of, communal use. In the same way that children's games have diverse sets of rules with no one rule applicable to every game, so languages have diverse sets of rules with no one rule applicable to all languages. While there is no objective all-encompassing standard by which to judge truth, one can make claims about what is true on the basis of a particular community's language game. This language game emerges from the community's form of life, which means that the meaning of a word is found in the way the community uses that word. There is no such thing as a private language, says Wittgenstein; language – including meaning and truth -- is sociologically constructed.

It may now be clearer why narrative postmodernism overcomes both logical positivism and the extreme relativism of philosophies that confine meaning and truth to individual capriciousness. In the first place, this postmodern tradition overcomes logical positivism by grounding epistemology in the community's story rather than solely in empirical or logical verification. This means that, although metaphysical, ethical, and theological language may not be empirically supportable, this language can continue to have meaning when used in the context out of which it arose. In short, narrative philosophy is postmodern in that it overcomes a narrow modern assumption about what can be rendered meaningful.

Jean Francois Lyotard has been particularly instrumental in identifying how, in the second place, Wittgenstein's narrative philosophy is postmodern. Lyotard argues that the myths (narrative discourse) we tell are not legitimated in something outside the myths themselves. Instead, authority is found in telling myths in the social setting (language game or form of life) in which they are meant to be told. There are no grand narratives or metaphysical schemes that account for all our stories; there are no certain foundations from which to build one's outlook on life. Rather, the culture-specific myths themselves define what is right and true.[11] This postmodern notion,

then, places authority in the community, not in the individual. Narrative postmodernism overcomes individualism's epistemological and ethical relativism by placing truth in the traditions of various communities.

George Lindbeck, in *The Nature of Doctrine*, utilizes Wittgenstein's narrative philosophy for a theological agenda. Lindbeck describes Christianity as a cultural-linguistic system that, at its core, is absolutely unchanging -- despite appearances to the contrary. To be a Christian, he argues, is to become a part of a community formed by the Christian socio-linguistic system.[12] This narrative understanding of the faith affords adherents the advantage of evading criticism by those outside the Christian community. Christians can evade this criticism because outsiders have not themselves been fashioned by the Christian cultural linguistic system and, therefore, cannot understand its distinctive truthfulness.

Although narrative postmodernism has found a prominent place in philosophical and theological circles, it is not without its critics. Opponents point out, first of all, that such an approach to language and custom allows no genuine space for criticism and reexamination of what has been "handed down by the saints." For instance, if a philosophical or theological tradition has supported patriarchy, anti-Semitism, or ecological recklessness, there exists no transcendent standard by which to seek this tradition's transformation. Because there can be no reference to an authority that transcends the community's particular language game, say critics, it would illegitimate to appeal to universal truths or a Being who ubiquitously reveals (e.g., God). Interfaith dialogue also has no authentic basis if religious communities find meaning exclusively in their own linguistic tradition.

Secondly, critics of narrative postmodernism are often dissatisfied with the narrative model, or lack thereof, for how one should understand the person, human self, soul, or individual. While it

may be true that modernism's emphasis upon the unrelated and essentially autonomous individual undermines ethical norms, a model that allows no room for some measure of independence seems no better. Stifling communitarianism can be even more devastating than uninhibited individualism.

We began our discussion of narrative postmodernism by speaking about stories. Individual stories are fashioned from community stories, it was argued. Narrative postmodernists call attention to the communally derived status of the stories we tell. One way to transition into discussing the final form of postmodernism addressed in this essay is to ask this question: Is there a story big enough to be told by everybody?

Revisionary Postmodernism

The final postmodernism explored in this essay is less well-known. The thought of philosophers Alfred North Whitehead, C. S. Pierce, Henri Bergson, Charles Hartshorne, and William James provide the fundamental notions of revisionary postmodernism. The postmodern status of this tradition has been raised to consciousness primarily through the work of David Ray Griffin.

Whitehead's thought overcomes what this postmodern tradition believes is modernity's unnatural fragmentation and compartmentalization of knowledge. This fragmentation and compartmentalization has resulted in the loss of a holistic perspective on reality. Whitehead's postmodernism returns to holism and interdisciplinarity by affirming a speculative metaphysics.

In everyday language, the task of metaphysics is about figuring out how things work. The metaphysician attempts to construct an all-embracing hypothesis in order to explain the wide diversity of life's experiences. Unfortunately, metaphysicians in the past have either failed to

consider the experiences of those at the margins (e.g., women, minorities, nonhumans) or believed that, once a metaphysical scheme had been provided, reconsideration of that scheme was needless. By contrast, Whitehead argues that metaphysicians must always be prepared to "amplify, recast, generalize, and adapt, so as to absorb into one system all sources of experience."[13] In light of this, Whitehead self-consciously attempted to construct a metaphysical hypothesis that was coherent, logical, applicable, and adequate. He hoped that this scheme would bear in itself "its own warrant of universality throughout all experience."[14] This valuing of diverse experiences provides this postmodern tradition with a crucial link with liberationist postmodernism.

The task of constructing an adequate metaphysics is closely tied with what has come to be called "worldview construction." Revisionary postmodernism overcomes the modern worldview by offering what it considers the most viable worldview for our time. This worldview accounts for a variety of sensibilities, including religious, scientific, ecological, liberationist, economic, and aesthetic. By contrast, deconstructive postmodernism overcomes the modern worldview through an antiworldview. Revisionary postmodernist David Griffin argues that deconstructive postmodernism "deconstructs or eliminates the ingredients necessary for a worldview, such as God, self, purpose, meaning, a real world, and truth as correspondence. . . .this type of postmodern thought [results] in relativism, even nihilism."[15]

Another characteristic of modernity that this revisionary postmodernism overcomes is the modern claim that one's knowledge about the external world can only be gained through sensory perception. Because many modernists discounted knowledge said to be gained any other way, fundamental notions like causation, love, value, and God were considered by these modernists as either unintelligible or unreal. Whitehead's revisionary postmodernism speculates that perception is not limited to one's five senses; nonsensory perception occurs all the time. Memory is a chief

example of how knowledge can be gained through nonsensory perception, because the mind recalls events from the past without using one's sensory organs. Dreaming is also an example of nonsensory perceiving. Revisionary postmodernists speculate that such nonsensory perception occurs even at less complex levels. Because of nonsensory perception, our awareness of value, love, causation, and deity, among other things, is possible.

The importance of nonsensory perception for theology is especially great. Although God, as spirit, is not perceptible to the senses, revisionary postmodernists can claim that creatures have direct experiences of God through nonsensory perception. Modern thought could only infer that God exists based upon indirect experience of what was considered the work of deity. Revisionary postmodernism also provides a means by which to account for our awareness of moral norms, standards of truth, and aesthetic intuitions, because this awareness is available to us through nonsensory perception. This revisionary postmodernism, then, provides an intellectually viable way to speak of the Spirit at work in all of creation.

Modernity, as revisionary postmodernists understand it, is also characterized by what might be called the mechanization of nature. Modernists considered living things to be nothing more than mindless machines; humans are only the most advanced of these purposeless mechanisms. By contrast, this revisionary postmodernism conceives of the structures of existence in organic categories. These categories provide a means to talk realistically about creaturely freedom and intentionality, two vital aspects of purposiveness. Furthermore, organismic philosophies emphasize the pervasiveness of experience. The revisionary postmodern doctrine of panexperientialism forwards the speculative hypothesis that, as Griffin puts it, "nature is actual and that the ultimate units of nature are not vacuous but are something for themselves in the sense of having experience, however slight."[16] Although the hypothesis that things experience other things is speculative, the idea that they are *devoid* of experience is doubly speculative.

After all, given our knowledge of ourselves, we know that it is possible for actual beings to have experience. However, we have no similar knowledge as to the possibility of actual beings that are without experience.

Finally, revisionary postmodernists agree with narrative postmodernists that creatures are not isolated individuals. Postmodernists of the revisionary stripe go further than narrative postmodernists, however, in affirming that all individuals, both human and nonhuman, are essentially interrelated. This interrelatedness provides a key insight and justification for the deep convictions of ecologists and environmentalists. The radical relationality of revisionary postmodernism provides a means for overcoming the dualisms of modernity originally established by Neo-platonic and Kantian philosophies.

The claim that creatures are interrelated should not, according to revisionary postmodernists, be equated with extreme relativism. Modern and deconstructive postmodern traditions *do* result in extreme relativism, because these traditions deny that there is any basis for holding that one system of beliefs corresponds to reality better than others. By contrast, revisionary postmodernism claims that those beliefs that we inevitably presuppose in practice, even if we deny them verbally, should be privileged. Whitehead formulated this principle as "the metaphysical rule of evidence: that we must bow to those presumptions, which, in despite of criticism, we still employ for the regulation of our lives."[17] This points to a bottom layer of experience that is common to all humanity. "If we cannot help presupposing these notions in practice," Griffin argues, "we are guilty of self-contradiction if our theory denies these notions. And the first rule of reason, including scientific reason, should be that two mutually contradictory propositions cannot both be true."[18] This means that "any scientific, philosophical, or theological theory is irrational . . . to the extent that it contradicts whatever notions we inevitably presuppose in practice."[19]

So what do the critics have to say about this revisionary postmodernism? Unfortunately, this postmodern tradition has not received widespread philosophical analysis. Theological critiques tend to offer two main objections, however. One objection is that this revisionary postmodernism conceives of God as essentially relational: God has always been related to a world. This form of relationality runs contrary to classical theologies, and it strikes some contemporary theologians as resulting in an overly dependent deity. Critics object to this revisionary postmodernism, secondly, because many revisionary postmodernists also conceive of divine power in relational categories. This conception imparts a doctrine of divine power involving the claim that God cannot entirely override or withdraw the freedom of creatures. The hypothesis that God cannot entirely override or withdraw creaturely freedom allows one to offer a solution to the problem of evil by affirming divine love unequivocally, and it also provides a basis for affirming theistic evolution. But some critics believe it also presents God as stunted or weak.

Conclusion

The times they are a-changin'. What the future course of life on this planet will entail is unclear. Which postmodern tradition will dominate and how its domination will affect life on planet earth is yet to be decided. Perhaps it would be good to close with a question, which postmodernism would you want to provide the vision for today and tomorrow?

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[1] This essay was originally written for my philosophy students at Eastern Nazarene College.

[2] Some are inclined to distinguish between early and late modernity. Although I believe this approach has some validity, I will not be exploring this distinction explicitly in this essay.

[3] Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 168.

[4] Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 67.

[5] Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 36.

[6] Jacques Derrida, "Signature, Event, Context" *From Plato to Derrida*, ed. Forrest E. Baird and Walter Kaufmann, 3rd ed. (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 2000), 1197.

[7] John Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida*: Religion Without Religion (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1997).

[8] Luce Irigaray, "The Sex Which is Not One," trans. Claudia Reeder, in *New French Feminisms,* ed. Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (New York: Schoken, 1981), 99-106.

[9] James H. Cone, *Martin and Malcolm and America: A Dream or a Nightmare* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1991).

[10] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 3rd ed. trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (New York: Macmillan, 1953).

[11] Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

[12] George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984).

[13]Alfred North Whitehead, *Religion in the Making* (New York: Macmillan, 1926; New York: Fordham University Press, 1996), 149.

[14]Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*, corrected edition, ed. David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne (New York: Free Press, 1978; orig. ed., 1929), 3-4.

[15] David Ray Griffin, *Founders of Constructive Postmodern Philosophy: Pierce, James, Bergson, Whitehead, and Hartshorne*, with John B. Cobb, Jr., Marcus Ford, Pete A. Y. Gunter, and Peter Ochs (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY, 1993), viii.

[16] Ibid., 3.

[17]Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas* (New York: Free Press, 1968; Macmillan, 1933), 223.

[18] Griffin, *Unsnarling the World-Knot: Freedom, Consciousness, and the Mind-Body Problem* (Berkeley Calif.: University of California Press, 1998), 21.

[19] Griffin, *Reenchantment Without Supernaturalism: A Process Philosophy of Religion* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2001), 36.