

POSTMODERNISM AND PSYCHOANALYSIS

A Heideggerian Critique of Postmodernist Malaise and the Question of Authenticity



M. Guy Thompson

Way Beyond Freud

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Postmodernism and Psychoanalysis: A Heideggerian Critique of Postmodernist Malaise and the Question of Authenticity

M. Guy Thompson, PhD

Thinking begins only when we have come to know that reason, glorified for centuries, is the most stiff-necked adversary of thought.

Martin Heidegger (1927/1962)

In the past decade or so the term postmodernism has captured the attention of a generation of artists, intellectuals, authors, and professionals to such a degree that the term has even crept into the comparatively sober psychoanalytic literature, the last place one would have expected to find it. Yet any marriage between the psychoanalytic treatment perspective with its painstaking, laborious pace, and postmodernism, with its premium on the arcane and fashionable, is unlikely, if not altogether illogical. What would a genuine postmodern psychoanalysis entail if indeed such were possible?

In addressing this question I will explore how postmodernism insinuated its way into the contemporary cultural milieu, examine where the basic threads of the postmodernist impulse originate, and assess its impact on the theory and practice of psychoanalysis. I will show that the postmodern

perspective originated with Nietzsche and that contemporary characterizations of it represent a comparatively superficial and ultimately nihilistic departure from its original inspiration. I then examine how Heidegger situated the essence of Nietzsche's arguments into his own depiction of the human condition, and the role that both Nietzsche's and Heidegger's respective conceptions of authenticity play in their philosophies.

NIETZSCHE'S IMPACT ON THE POSTMODERN PERSPECTIVE

Although postmodernism was only recently introduced into philosophical debate (by Jean-Francois Lyotard, 1993), it is commonly acknowledged that the concept itself alludes to a sensibility that has haunted Western culture since the 19th century, beginning with Nietzsche. The fact that Nietzsche was hardly known or discussed by philosophers until Heidegger brought him into prominence adds to the mysterious manner in which postmodernism emerged as a force in contemporary culture. Indeed, many of the tenets that form the corpus of Nietzsche's philosophy are basic elements of the postmodern perspective. Yet postmodernism is not a philosophical school that one can simply adopt or reject but a movement in culture that, like the object of psychoanalytic inquiry, sneaks upon us unawares, as though we had hardly been conscious of its presence.

Nietzsche was unusual in that he didn't write systematic narratives on

epistemology or metaphysics, but instead wrote in aphorisms that resemble the pre-Socratic philosophers whom Nietzsche fashioned himself after. One of the reasons Nietzsche (1967) rejected questions about the nature of truth and reality was because he believed the foundations of philosophy should be overturned in light of his observation that God is dead and that we are alone in the universe without an ultimate purpose or reason. Nietzsche's antifoundationalism is a core of both his philosophy and the postmodern perspective. Whether or not one follows Nietzsche in his rejection of God and religion, modern and postmodern philosophical thought is characterized by an explicit avoidance of talk about God or reliance on religious belief as a foundation for what we know of our existence.

Nietzsche's (1994) real target in his attack on Christianity was not God specifically but the reliance on any authority that presumes to tell us how we should live our lives. In Nietzsche's estimation, anyone who needs such values to guide his or her actions is simply being dishonest (or "inauthentic") with himself. Similarly, Nietzsche also rejected the worship of science and progress, which he viewed as palliatives for the masses that serve to keep them in line and save them the trouble of assuming responsibility for their lives.

Like Schopenhauer and Montaigne, Nietzsche was also a sceptic and denied our capacity to know anything except our own experience—and even

that is open to doubt. In contrast, most philosophers begin with a core of beliefs that are taken to be self-evidently true, such as the existence of a physical world. Such beliefs may be reasonable, but proving them, as many sceptics have demonstrated, is virtually impossible. The problem with such beliefs (i.e., metaphysics), though innocent enough in themselves, is that they lead to other assumptions that are equally impossible to prove but are nonetheless employed to “explain” things that are impossible to know, such as the “contents” of the unconscious. Ironically, Nietzsche is credited as one of the original proponents of the unconscious, but he used it as one of his weapons against science, which Nietzsche accused of pretending to explain everything. This anomaly implies that some conceptions of the unconscious are consistent with scepticism whereas others are unabashedly dogmatic. Nietzsche had a high tolerance for ignorance and accepted that most things in life are impossible to explain and needn’t be explained in order for us to live our lives to the fullest.

A favorite target of Nietzsche’s scepticism was the Enlightenment, a cultural era that began toward the end of the 17th century. Though there is considerable debate as to what the Enlightenment was and whether we are still living in it, it has had a critical impact on the role science and politics currently play in society. Nietzsche rejected the values of the Enlightenment and Enlightenment philosophers such as Descartes who held that the capacity to reason is the basis of what makes us human. Although the capacity for

rationality has been championed by philosophers since Plato, Descartes was the first philosopher who wedded the scientific application of reason to every facet of Western society, making it a cultural phenomenon (Ariew, Cottingham, & Sorell, 1998). Other Enlightenment philosophers such as Rousseau emphasized the relation between reason and political progress. Like Descartes, Rousseau believed that humans are rational creatures whose capacity for reason makes them autonomous in their decision-making, manifested in the free and informed selection of political candidates in electoral democracies. Kant emphasized the relationship between reason and ethics. According to Kant, Enlightenment values gave Europeans an unprecedented source of self-confidence in the pursuit of scientific, political, and moral progress.

If the Enlightenment can be said to embody one value above all others, it is epitomized by the belief in "progress." This value in particular defines the Modern era, more or less consistent with the Enlightenment. Following Darwin, the belief in progress assumes that all living organisms are in an inexorable process of evolution, but humans, given their capacity for reason, are alone able to influence the course that science and society follow. The Enlightenment's inherent Utopianism derives from the conviction that society will inevitably improve from one generation to the next and that scientific breakthroughs will make our material existence easier and, hence, more satisfying. Nietzsche rejected this assumption and countered that in other

respects our lives are actually getting worse, because the more passionate side of our existence obeys neither science nor reason and is even suppressed by them, a view that anticipated (or perhaps influenced)

Freud's views about civilization. Moreover, each and every human being has to come to terms with the same problems that have beset human existence since the beginning of recorded history: How to be at peace with ourselves, how to live with others, and how to make the most of what life has to offer. In Nietzsche's opinion, our capacity to reason is not as objectively reliable as Enlightenment philosophers claimed, because humans are driven by passion, the source of which is usually unconscious.^[1]

Another component of Nietzsche's scepticism is his historical relativism, which is consistent with his perspectivism. Relativism argues that all so-called truths are relative to a time and place and thus are not eternal or objective, but highly personal and fluid, whereas perspectivism is based on the idea that truth is wedded to the perspective of the person who promotes it. Because everyone's perspective is different, not merely from one person to another but from one moment or situation to the next, each of us abides by different truths at different times and occasions, so the task of ever knowing ourselves and others is constantly unfolding. Another, more contemporary way of putting this is that reality is what we interpret it to be and that our interpretations are more indebted to our passions than our reasons.

Nietzsche's view that knowledge is culture-bound has also influenced contemporary philosophers of science, such as Paul Feyerabend (1999) and Thomas Kuhn (1962).

Yet another target of Nietzsche's assault on the Enlightenment was Descartes's belief in the "self." Disturbed by the rising influence of scepticism among thinkers of his generation, Descartes set out to determine at least one irrefutable truth that could resist sceptical doubt, which for Descartes was: I am certain I exist because I am capable of asking myself this very question, thus proving that there is a mind that can question its own existence, if only my own. Descartes's *cogito ergo sum* led Western culture toward a radical egocentricity that instantly transformed every individual's relationship with the world into a "problem" that needed to be solved. His next step was to imbue the self with qualities that define permanent aspects of a given individual's "personality." The Enlightenment definition of selfhood thus became rooted in the myth of a stable core in one's self-identity that defines who each person is. Nietzsche categorically rejected the concept of a stable ego and attributed its existence to nothing more than a trick of language. Because we are accustomed to use the personal pronoun in grammatical forms of address we foster the myth that there is indeed such an entity as an "I" or a "me," what Nietzsche termed linguistic determinism. Just because we can say all sorts of things about ourselves and others grammatically—such as "Jane is a jewel" or "Harry is a jerk"—we take these expressions to contain a

truth about the so-called person in question that simply isn't so. Nietzsche's scepticism helped him to realize that none of us can ever know ourselves or others with much accuracy, let alone certainty. Though we think, for example, that we know people when we love them, our love frequently blinds us to qualities in that person that are available to anyone else. This is only one example of how transitory and impressionable our belief in our own and the other's self can be.

Perhaps Nietzsche's most radical assault on the Enlightenment was embodied in his moral scepticism. The Enlightenment held that some moral principles are eternal and consistent with what it means to be civilized, that because humans are rational they are capable of learning what it means to be moral and, with sufficient effort, to become so. Once God was out of the way Nietzsche was in a position to argue that there is no ultimate foundation for morality and that the only morals that exist are arbitrarily chosen by a given society. History has shown that each era alters its perspective as to what our scruples should be, each assuming its values are more "enlightened" than the last, a view that was zealously embraced by Enlightenment thinkers. This assumption, however, assumes that humans are free to behave in whatever manner the current morality tells them to. Though Nietzsche blamed most of these assumptions on Christianity, it doesn't matter what one's views about religion are for Nietzsche's message to be compelling. One only has to take a peek at today's headlines to confirm that the world is inhabited by countless

“moralities,” each claiming some form of ascendance over the others, many of which are rooted in one religious belief or another. But even among those who reject religion there is a tendency to embrace a set of moral principles in dogmatic fashion, then condemning those that opt for a different set of values than their own. Nietzsche observed long before Freud that humans are duplicitous by nature and, hence, pretend to live their lives by one set of ideals while surreptitiously embracing another.

Nietzsche proposed to overcome these examples of moral hypocrisy by situating his philosophy in a pre-Socratic ideal that was in opposition to the subsequent Christian era that has dominated the Western world since the Roman Empire. In Nietzsche’s estimation pre-Christian Greeks lived their lives passionately and spontaneously and exemplified a Dionysian spirit that was subsequently suppressed by the weaker, more “democratic” Athenians. (Nietzsche conjectured that Christian culture subsequently derived its Apollonian values from post-Socratic Athens while suppressing the more passionate Dionysian values that were rooted in Spartan and other pre-Socratic cultures.) He concluded that Modern Man is afraid of life and protects himself from his fears by overvaluing his Apollonian (rationalistic) nature at the expense of his Dionysian spontaneity. While both qualities are aspects of every individual, Nietzsche argued that Western culture has emphasized the Apollonian to its detriment, culminating in what he foresaw as the collapse of Western civilization, though in hindsight we have adapted handily to our

moral hypocrisy by situating both qualities in neurotic compromise formations.

THE BASIC ELEMENTS OF THE POSTMODERN PERSPECTIVE

So what impact has Nietzsche's philosophy had on postmodernism? Perhaps the principal problem in addressing this question is that nobody knows exactly what postmodernism means. Although there is a tendency among contemporary authors to depict the postmodern perspective as antithetical to modernism, there is little agreement as to what even modernism entails. For some authors it appears to be interchangeable with the Enlightenment, while for others it is a 20th-century phenomenon that originated with modern art and architecture, influencing currents in 20th-century thinking that are in some respects consistent with postmodernism and in other respects in contrast to it. Both Nietzsche and Heidegger, for example, have been accused by most postmodernist thinkers of being rooted in the so-called modern era, though they have contributed to what has subsequently emerged as the postmodernist perspective.

As I will show later, the attempt to situate postmodernism in contrast to modernism is both misleading and unsupportable. It is more accurate to say that virtually all postmodernist thinkers are united in their condemnation of the "progressive" element of the Enlightenment, including such precursors as

Nietzsche and Heidegger, who deserve the credit for having inspired this perspective in the first place. The term “modern” is confusing because it has been used in a variety of ways, sometimes in concert with the Enlightenment and sometimes in opposition to it. Moreover, some of the Enlightenment thinkers who are regarded as having ushered in the modern era, such as Descartes, were opposed to scepticism whereas others, such as Montaigne, were avowed sceptics. These are only some of the reasons why the term “modernism” is too complex to use interchangeably with Enlightenment values. Moreover, if there is one trend that epitomizes the postmodernist perspective, it is not its antimodernism but its scepticism. For my purposes, postmodernism is inextricably connected to the modern era, which for practical reasons originated in the 20th century.

I shall examine the sceptical dimension of postmodernism shortly, but before doing so I shall review those aspects of Nietzsche’s philosophy that presaged the postmodernist perspective. These can be listed as:

- a) An *opposition to authority* characterized by an antifoundational bias.
- b) An inherent *scepticism* that permeates both Nietzsche’s philosophy and postmodernism, exemplified by the rejection of absolute truths and any viewpoint that verges into metaphysics.
- c) A *perspectivist* orientation which holds that truth is wedded to the

perspective of the person who promotes it.

- d) A moral and historical *relativism* based on the view that all so-called truths are relative to a time and place and, hence, neither eternal or objective but highly personal and fluid.
- e) A decentering of the *subject* that rejects the conventional notion of the self or ego as autonomous and in possession of its own volition.
- f) An emphasis on *surface* instead of depth, a position which holds that there is no depth to the personality, as such, because we are what we *do*, not what we take ourselves to *be*.
- g) An emphasis on *language* that permeates all the features of postmodernism listed above, deriving from sceptical doubt as to the accuracy of what language is capable of revealing about ourselves and the world in which we live.
- h) An opposition to *Enlightenment* values epitomized by the “grand narratives” of utopian thinkers such as Hegel and Marx, and the notion that civilization is in a constant state of “progression” toward an increasingly beneficial future. Whereas Nietzsche was unequivocal that such progress has an unforeseen corrupting effect on our capacity for authenticity, postmodernists are equivocal about the role of technology and even embrace it as an essential component of the postmodern era, embodied in the cinema, television, media, and computer sciences. But whereas Nietzsche retained a romanticism about the superiority of Greek culture, postmodernists reject romanticism as an artefact of

the Enlightenment.

So, was Nietzsche a postmodernist? It is evident from the above that there are important differences between Nietzsche's philosophy and contemporary postmodernism. Yet all of the principal proponents of postmodernism, such as Michel Foucault (1986), Francois Lyotard (1993), Jacques Derrida (1978), and Jean Baudrillard (1983), have been profoundly influenced by Nietzsche. But Nietzsche also enjoyed an equally profound impact on phenomenology and existentialism (e.g., Heidegger and Sartre, respectively), philosophical movements that are in opposition to postmodernism. Perhaps the principal difference between Nietzsche and postmodernist thinkers is the former's conception of authenticity, which postmodernists passionately oppose. This dispute is so central to my argument that I will examine it in more detail below, including Heidegger's contribution to postmodernism and the role that authenticity plays in Nietzsche's and Heidegger's respective philosophies.

HEIDEGGER'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE POSTMODERN PERSPECTIVE

As we have seen, Nietzsche played a decisive role in the development of the postmodern perspective, yet little would have been known of Nietzsche's importance had it not been for Heidegger, who brought Nietzsche into contemporary debate with his first major publication, *Being and Time* (1962).

[2] Moreover, many elements of Heidegger's philosophy were derived from Nietzsche, including Heidegger's critique of authority, his sceptical bent, his moral relativism, his decentering of the subject, his emphasis on the hermeneutic dimension of language and, perhaps most importantly, his rejection of Enlightenment values, though there are many features of Heidegger's philosophy that are not indebted to Nietzsche and even more antithetical to the postmodern perspective than was Nietzsche. It is nevertheless surprising that postmodernists such as Lyotard, Foucault, and Derrida are dismissive of Heidegger's role in the emergence of postmodern thought. According to Sim (1999), "Postmodern philosophers argue that, although Heidegger developed a number of strategies by which he endeavored to escape from the era of *modernity*, he could never finally extricate himself from his own age" (p. 276). Yet Sim acknowledges that despite the postmodernist's aversion to Heidegger's emphasis on ontology and his preoccupation with the nature of Being,

[H]e systematically exposes the inscrutability of Being as that which eludes our modes of thought. At the very least, Heidegger's relentless attempts to undo the conceptual knots in the history of the philosophy of Being began the destruction of metaphysics which was to be taken up by *deconstruction* and other postmodern strategies, (p. 276)

Moreover, Derrida and Lyotard have implicitly acknowledged their debt to Heidegger, and Derrida attributes the inspiration for his deconstructive method to Heidegger's "destruction" of Western metaphysics. So why is

Heidegger not embraced as a forefather to postmodernism and, even more paradoxically, why is he branded an agent of modernism? The answer to these questions is fundamental to how the contemporary postmodernist perspective is conceived and explains why Heidegger as well as Nietzsche are not wholeheartedly embraced as postmodernist thinkers. The answer appears to boil down to Heidegger's ontological perspective and the role of authenticity in his philosophy. One must also consider Heidegger's scathing critique of modern technology as a source of contention among postmodernists who embrace the "techno-arts" as celebrated in film, television, and the media, all targets of Heidegger's assessment of 20th-century values. And finally, though one would expect scepticism to serve as the glue that would bind contemporary postmodernists to both Heidegger and Nietzsche in common cause, we shall find that the kind of scepticism that influenced the postmodernists is of a different color from that which guided Heidegger and Nietzsche in their respective philosophical outlooks.

Postmodernists tend to confuse Heidegger's emphasis on ontology with the traditional form of metaphysics that they reject: the notion that there is a reality behind or underneath appearances that we can never know but can think our way to by virtue of our capacity to reason. In fact, Heidegger's entire philosophy is a rejection of metaphysics, substituting in its place a conception of ontology that the American postmodernist philosopher Richard Rorty (1991) has applauded for its inherently pragmatic sensibility. Moreover,

Heidegger argues that our contact with the world is not mediated through reason but is given to us directly, by virtue of our capacity to experience the world (as Being)^[3] in a manner that avoids intellectualization,^[4] whereas postmodernists typically reject *experience* as an artefact of the modernist conception of autonomy and selfhood. In fact, Heidegger conceives ontology as a *nonrationalistic* form of thinking that he characterizes as meditative, a form of thinking that scientists and academics alike have dismissed in preference to a manner of thinking that is essentially theoretical and calculative, i.e., rational. But if meditative thinking isn't rational, what kind of thinking does it entail? J. Glenn Gray (1968) suggests it is helpful to first consider what Heidegger does not mean by meditative thinking.

[Meditative] thinking is, in the first place, not what we call having an opinion or a notion. Second, it is not representing or having an idea (*vorstellen*) about something or a state of affairs Third, [meditative] thinking is not ratiocination, developing a chain of premises which lead to a valid conclusion [Meditative] thinking is not so much an act as a way of living or dwelling—as we in America would put it, a way of life. (pp. x-xi)

Moreover, according to Macquarrie (1994), “Meditation [for Heidegger] suggests a kind of thought in which the mind is docile and receptive to whatever it is thinking about. Such thought may be contrasted [for example] with the active investigative thought of the natural sciences” (pp. 77-78). In other words, meditative thinking (which bears a striking resemblance to Freud's conception of free association) hinges on undergoing an *experience*

with thinking, free of intellectual gymnastics. In comparison, Heidegger characterizes calculative (i.e., rationalistic) thinking as a byproduct of the technological age in which we live. Though its roots go back to Plato, its impact on modern culture became decisive with the scientific revolution that was inspired by Descartes in the 16th century. The tendency to perceive the world in the abstract and conceptual manner that calculative thinking entails took an even sharper turn in the 20th century, with the birth of the computer era and the technological innovations that have developed over the last hundred years. Though it would be misleading to conclude that Heidegger was opposed to science, there's no denying he believed science has overtaken our lives to such a extent that we have forgotten how to think in a nonscientific manner. One of Heidegger's most famous statements about the status of contemporary science is that "science does not *think!*" and that the thinking science employs is an impoverished variety that is thought-less, or thought-poor. These arguments are both complicated and subtle because, on the one hand, Heidegger agrees with postmodernists more than they are prone to acknowledge whereas, on the other, the areas of disagreement are more radical, including their respective attitudes about values.

With the exception of the postmodernist rejection of authenticity, nowhere is the disagreement between Heidegger and contemporary postmodernists more pronounced than in their respective views about technology. Whereas postmodernists reject values in principle and argue that

we have no way of determining, for example, whether technology and science are good or bad, Heidegger argues that the role technology has played in our lives since the industrial revolution has been detrimental to our humanity. Because postmodernists reject the argument that there is a human nature to protect or endanger, their assessment of technology is relatively benign, or neutral (with the possible exception of Lyotard's concern about technology's deleterious effects on culture). Heidegger was among the first philosophers to bring our attention to the manner in which technology has become a tool of the modern era, epitomized by American capitalism and the totalitarian system of the Soviet Union.

Heidegger's critique of technology is so startling that it has been sorely misunderstood by many of his critics. Much of the postmodern era is identified with the electronic transmission of images and information via film, television, and computer technology, recently morphing into a global village that is transmitted over the Internet. Reserving judgment on this cultural revolution, postmodernists have avoided casting aspersions on the negative aspects of these innovations and see themselves instead as merely chronicling its development. In contrast Heidegger and Nietzsche before him were less enamored of science and its technological appendages and alarmed about the direction into which modern (and postmodern) man is heading. Heidegger's concern was not with technical innovations themselves, whether they be weapons of mass destruction or the latest medical breakthrough, but

with an element of *modern* (as opposed to ancient) technology that diverged from the simple tools that served human beings in earlier epochs: its sheer magnitude.

Indeed, the source of capitalism's recent success is rooted in the discovery that if manufacturers were to sell their products in larger quantities they could lower the prices charged to consumers and increase sales, thus eliminating their smaller competitors and increasing the market share (and profits) for their investors. Whereas Heidegger would look at the way the typical Hollywood movie is obliged to hypnotize its audiences in order to sell vast quantities of tickets and hence maximize profits (thus undermining the artistic quality of the product in the process), the postmodernist is interested in the medium of film itself and the narrower question as to how the experience of watching movies affects the viewer. The former is concerned with the corrupting impact of mass technology on our culture, whereas the latter brackets such questions and instead examines how the medium serves to "construct" the viewer's psyche.

The 20th century witnessed one industry after another—e.g., groceries, clothing, vehicles, medicine, etc.—evolve from a collection of small, family-operated endeavors into international conglomerates, whose size has the power to destroy smaller, independent businesses in their wake. The masses support such measures because these products come at bargain prices and

thus raise their living standards. Such technological innovations, however, don't merely change the way we conduct business; they also affect the quality of our lives, not materially, but spiritually and existentially. The easy manner in which the attack of September 11, 2001 on the World Trade Center in New York, for example, nearly destroyed the international tourist industry demonstrates how precarious the world economy has become, rooted in the cultivation of profligate spending. Our postmodern culture is increasing the pace at which we work and commute to and from the workplace to a frenzy, making it increasingly difficult to take the time to ponder the subtle mysteries of our existence and what purpose our all-too-brief lifespans should serve.

As we devote more of our time to making enough money to support the materialistic lifestyle to which we have become accustomed, modern technology grows like a cancer that carries us ever more quickly toward a future that is as alluring as it is ominous, toward what Nietzsche and Heidegger feared would be the collapse of civilization. Like Nietzsche, Heidegger harked back to an earlier era, epitomized by the early Greeks, when life was relatively simple and relationships were comparatively straightforward and enduring. Postmodernists dismiss such sentiments as signs of a decaying romanticism that they associate with the Enlightenment, an era in which the German Romanticism that influenced both Nietzsche and Heidegger was in ascendance. But Heidegger cannot be so easily dismissed as a romantic or a modernist because the quality of life he warns is endangered

is not a moral issue but an ontological one. It is not a question as to what is right or wrong but which is most ostensibly *human*. This is probably the most contentious source of disagreement between Heidegger and postmodernist thinkers and the reason why Heidegger's conception of authenticity is so controversial.

POSTMODERNISM AND AUTHENTICITY

Although Heidegger was the first philosopher to employ "authenticity" as a technical term, both Nietzsche's and Kierkegaard's respective philosophies are sources for this component of Heidegger's philosophy. For Nietzsche, authenticity characterized the person who is not afraid to face up to the fundamental anxieties of living. Such an individual is embodied in Nietzsche's conception of the *Übermensch*, usually translated into English as "overman" or "superman," who would come to grips with his fears and overcome the weight of his or her existence by accepting reality for what it is, unbowed and unafraid. Such a person would permit the Dionysian aspect of his being to dominate over his more rationalistic and repressive Apollonian side.

Postmodernists have rejected Nietzsche's ideal as merely the latest edition in a long history of such mythic figures (e.g., the Marxist proletarian, Freud's perfectly analyzed individual, or Sartre's existentialist hero) that fails

to take into account the severe limitations that human beings must contend with and ultimately accept. While there is some truth to this assessment of Nietzsche's hero, one would be mistaken to construe Heidegger's authentic individual as nothing more than a 20th-century edition of Nietzsche's *Übermensch*. One of the principal differences between Nietzsche's *Übermensch* and Heidegger's notion of authenticity is that for Heidegger there is no such person who epitomizes the "authentic hero" in juxtaposition to people who are inauthentic. Authenticity is characterized by Heidegger as a specific act or moment in any individual's life where the context in which a situation arises offers an opportunity to behave authentically or not. Moreover, the concept is so central to Heidegger's philosophy that it is difficult to appreciate what authenticity entails without an understanding of his philosophical outlook. Space doesn't permit me to summarize Heidegger's philosophy, but suffice it to say that, unlike Nietzsche, Heidegger was not talking about an ideal person who would some day emerge to replace the stereotypical contemporary neurotic, a view that is moralistic as well as pathogenic. Instead, Heidegger argues, all human creatures are inauthentic by their nature, but sometimes behave authentically when they rise to the occasion. Of course, we are challenged to do so virtually every moment of our lives, but are usually too distracted to notice. So how do we manage to act authentically in spite of our condition and, more to the point, what would doing so entail?

In order to understand what authenticity entails it is necessary to know what it means to be inauthentic. Carman (2000) observes that there are two distinct depictions of inauthenticity in Heidegger's magnum opus, *Being and Time* (1962), that appear to contradict each other but in fact are complementary. Both are aspects of "fallenness" (*Verfallenheit*), a fundamental component of inauthenticity, characteristic of the individual who sells out to public opinion in order to curry favor or success. A central theme throughout Heidegger's early work is the relationship between the individual and society and how this relationship sets up a tension that the individual, contrary to Nietzsche, never entirely overcomes. This is because humans are existentially isolated from one another and, in their loneliness, crave the comfort of feeling at one with others, not unlike the "oceanic" experience Freud describes in *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930). For Heidegger and Nietzsche alike, this sense of belonging is an illusion. We spend all our lives searching for a feeling of communion only to find our reward is always one more step out of reach. This quest is inconsolable, says Heidegger, because the only way of approximating this feeling—short of falling in love—is by abandoning an essential aspect of what we are about: our personal integrity. Hence, one version of "falling" into inauthenticity describes the human condition from which we cannot escape, whereas the other version becomes manifest when a person *tries* to escape his isolation by capitulating to social incentives to do so. Yet, if we are condemned to *be* inauthentic as a

fundamental facet of our existence, how can we also be granted a choice in the matter, to choose *not* to be so on certain occasions? In other words, how can one become authentic if one is fundamentally inauthentic?

A good example of the inherent difficulty in recognizing this distinction was Heidegger's own fall into inauthenticity when he joined the National Socialist Party in Germany in the 1930s, when he believed he was giving his soul in service to his country. Because sacrifice is an essential aspect of authenticity, Heidegger believed he was behaving courageously and resolutely when he embraced the Nazis. Later, shortly before his death, Heidegger characterized his disastrous excursion into politics as an incidence of inauthenticity, an insight that only came to him *in hindsight*. In other words, one cannot necessarily tell when one is behaving authentically or inauthentically in the moment of doing so. After the fact, Heidegger could recognize he was mistaken to believe that National Socialism (or for that matter, any political platform) could serve as a vehicle for authenticity. Like so many others, he was caught up in the feeling of being at one with the German people and even saw himself as an instrument of National Socialism's future success, short-lived though this expectation turned out to be.^[5] Because any act necessarily exists in time, it is necessary to give one's actions the time they require to reveal, in their unfolding, what those actions were about, after the fact (a fundamental tenet of psychoanalytic investigation). Thus Heidegger's conception of authenticity offers little in the way of

reassuring, external markers that can discern the motives one is serving at the moment action is taken, because our motives are always, to a significant degree, hidden.

Both Nietzsche and Heidegger recognized the terrible sense of anxiety that lies at the bottom of our inauthenticity, but Heidegger was more adept at characterizing the precise features of this dread for what it is, the experience of being alive. Instead of trying to flee from our anxieties by suppressing them we can choose to listen to what they tell us about ourselves. Heidegger realized that because there is no ultimate foundation for our values or our behavior, we can never feel at home in the world. Yet because we are thrown into a world that is not of our choosing, it is up to us to determine what meaning our lives will have. The inauthentic individual, like the neurotic, is incapable of accepting the anxiety and hardship that our everyday existence entails. Instead, he complains about his lot and the unfairness of the hand that is dealt him. For Nietzsche and Heidegger alike, the ability to accept life on its terms, to suffer the day-to-day blows that are impossible to avoid or escape, brings with it a reward that only authenticity can offer: the experience of genuinely coming into one's own.

Like original sin, we live in inauthenticity as a matter of course, but we also aspire to rise above our base motives by struggling against the temptation of blindly following the herd. Though Heidegger was instrumental

in our era's recognition of the illusory nature of the self, he argued that because the self is impressionable it is imperative to find a way home, without selling ourselves short. This task is made difficult because it is impossible to know from one moment to the next what our motivations are, and whose motives we are, in fact, serving. It is easy to see why Heidegger's conception of authenticity is so troubling to Marxists (e.g., Habermas and Adorno) who scorn the very concept as a dangerous delusion. If no one can set definitive standards for what authenticity entails, then how can one ever know whether one is merely acting from ambition at the expense of everyone else? Ironically, this criticism is more descriptive of Nietzsche's characterization of the *Übermensch* and its proximity to nihilism, and even of the postmodern perspective that is dubious of political and moral values in principle. Yet Heidegger's critics argue that authenticity is just one more universal value that Heidegger, despite his rejection of modernity, succumbed to. But Heidegger would counter in turn that authenticity is not a value per se but depicts those moments when the individual is able to resist the illusion of ever finally belonging to a "good" greater than one's own. If there is a value here it is the value of facing reality.

Heidegger's depiction of authenticity has no foundation other than the individual's conscience, for better or worse. In order to be one's own, honestly and authentically, one is obliged to suffer the isolation and loneliness that follow when we refuse to compromise our personal values for

material or popular gain, as epitomized by political “correctness.” For Heidegger, postmodernism is antithetical to a philosophy of authenticity because it embraces inauthenticity as a matter of course. Any perspective that lives on the surface while rejecting a depth to one’s deliberations, that celebrates a conception of selfhood which changes as easily as the channels on television, that dismisses traditional values such as conscience, honesty, and goodness just because we lack immutable standards against which such values can be assessed, and whose apparent purpose is to find fault with any pronouncement that aspires to be positive by staking a position of one’s own is a perspective that celebrates inauthenticity at every turn. As such, it is a nihilism that feeds on everything that preceded it while applauding itself as the latest intellectual fashion. Such a perspective, though rooted in a scepticism of sorts, is nevertheless a form of scepticism that is fundamentally alien to the kind that Nietzsche and Heidegger delineate.

THE SCEPTICAL DIMENSION TO NIETZSCHE'S AND HEIDEGGER'S RESPECTIVE PHILOSOPHIES

If Heidegger’s conception of authenticity represents the most glaring difference between his philosophy and postmodernism, the differences in their respective debt to scepticism are not so easy to determine. All postmodern thinkers agree that postmodernism is rooted in a sceptical perspective, epitomized by its rejection of ultimate reality, knowledge, and

truth. But there are many kinds of scepticism, so if postmodernists are sceptics, so are many other philosophers who preceded the postmodern era, including Nietzsche, Heidegger, Berkeley, Spinoza, Schopenhauer, Bayle, Hume, Montaigne, Wittgenstein, Santayana, and Kierkegaard, and even Shakespeare. Although some commentators have characterized the postmodern turn as a paradigm shift in 20th-century philosophy and culture, scepticism has been around for ages, going back to the pre-Socratics. Even in ancient times there were divisions within the sceptic camps that separated, for example, the Pyrrhonian (or “Therapeutic”) sceptics, many of whom were physicians, from the Academic sceptics, who resided in universities and occupied themselves with abstract questions about the nature of truth and knowledge. In order to assess the relevance between the sceptic tradition and postmodernism it is necessary to know more about the history of scepticism and why Nietzsche’s and Heidegger’s identification with the sceptical tradition is so foreign to the one that postmodernists employ.

The word “sceptic” comes from the Greek *skeptikos* meaning thoughtful, reflective, so the notion of “doubting,” per se, is not intrinsic to how scepticism began. Whereas modern sceptics, including postmodernists, reduce scepticism to a radical capacity for doubt, Mates (1996) argues that the term “doubt” appears nowhere in Sextus Empiricus’s writings,^[6] except in some mistranslations of his text into English. For some reason, modern sceptics have made philosophical doubt the cornerstone of their depiction of

sceptic inquiry, whereas Mates argues that the characteristic attitude of the ancient Pyrrhonists was one of *aporia*, “of being at a loss, puzzled, stumped, or stymied” (p. 5). Hence, unlike doubting, *aporia* doesn’t imply understanding, a principal feature of postmodernism, which claims to understand, for example, what is wrong with modernism. Like the psychoanalyst today, the ancient sceptics sought to inquire into the nature of experience by abandoning prejudice and claims to ultimate knowledge (such as, How can I conduct my life so that I can be certain of the outcome?).

According to Hallie (1964), “Scepticism [was] the hope of living normally and peacefully without metaphysical dogmatism or fanaticism” (p. 7). Groarke (1990) adds that traces of the sceptic attitude can be seen as early as Democritus and Socrates (circa 450 BCE), when the Greeks crystallized three philosophical trends that were subsequently incorporated into the sceptical outlook:^[7] (a) an anti-realist bias; (b) the turn to a more personal attitude about truth; and (c) the development of philosophy away from epistemological concerns and toward a practical means of relieving mental anguish by achieving equanimity—all this before the so-called postmodern paradigm shift, 2500 years later! The sceptics believed that most philosophers were of little use to the common man and, like Socrates before them, devoted their efforts to exposing the fallacy of what philosophers claimed to know. Instead, the sceptics viewed philosophy as a therapy whose purpose is to engender the ability to live in harmony with the world.

Scepticism proper is attributed to Pyrrho of Elis, who lived around 300 BCE, during the time of Alexander the Great. After Plato's death the sceptics assumed control of his Academy and transformed it into a forum for philosophical debate. These Academic sceptics, however, diverged from the original. Therapeutic sceptics by becoming increasingly abstract and epistemological in their preoccupations, similar to the current difference between research and clinical psychologists. The subsequent fracture of scepticism into two camps, however, made it even more influential and the movement continued to flourish until after the middle of the fourth century CE, when it was apparently suppressed by Christianity. Scepticism subsequently resurfaced in 1562 and became the philosophical rage in Europe by serving as an indispensable tool for intellectual debate. Erasmus, Montaigne, Mersenne, Gassendi, and Descartes are only some of the philosophers, scientists, and theologians who were either influenced by the sceptic method of inquiry or, in the case of Descartes, committed to refuting it.

The impact of scepticism on the Enlightenment was considerable, but it also splintered into the same opposing camps that characterized the schism between the ancient Therapeutic and Academic sceptics. Most of these modern sceptics immersed themselves in debates as to whether it is possible to know anything by contriving arguments that are impossible to prove or disprove, such as the "brain in the vat" scenario. How do I know, for example,

that my brain is not in a vat on Alpha Centauri and my experiences and beliefs are being produced by direct electrical and chemical stimulation of my brain by advanced intelligent beings? This form of scepticism is interested neither in therapy nor in people's happiness, but preoccupies itself with the impossibility of knowing anything.

Though contemporary critics of scepticism dismiss it because the rejection of truth itself offers little in the way of practical gain, such objections are the consequence of lumping all sceptics together, overlooking the distinction between Therapeutic and Academic traditions. Sceptics who limit themselves to questions of epistemology, as we saw earlier, become proponents of nihilism, whereas sceptics who follow the Pyrrhonian tradition are occupied with the inherently practical task of obtaining relief from mental suffering. The latter observed that the unhappy person suffers because he is constantly searching for "answers" that he believes can be obtained from experts or theories. The sceptic counters that peace of mind comes not from obtaining ultimate truths but by recognizing that embracing such truths is what made him neurotic in the first place. In other words, the sceptic argues that people become neurotic because they assume the worst whenever they encounter a loss or prolonged hardship; thus their anxiety derives from their *conviction* (i.e., "knowledge") that all hope is lost and that their future is bleak. Yet experience tells us that momentary failure often leads to unexpected opportunity, if only we can abandon our negativistic convictions that we

know what the future will bring. This was the principal insight that drew Nietzsche and Heidegger to the sceptics in the first place, a tradition that is neither modern nor postmodern but, if anything, pre- or a-modern.

Thus the rejection of all values, whether personal or therapeutic, is the principal difference between the scepticism that was embraced by Nietzsche and Heidegger and the version that inhabits contemporary postmodernism. But by rejecting personal values as well as universal ones postmodernists have thrown out the baby with the bathwater, to use a tired phrase. To claim, for example, that truth is not absolute but relative, that moral values are not necessarily universal, and that no authority is beyond reproach doesn't necessarily imply that categories of truth, values, and authority are pernicious to philosophical debate and consideration. Indeed, it is precisely because these categories are no longer absolute that we are obliged to debate them in order to determine which values we will choose to live our lives by. These are the questions that become manifest when considering the impact postmodernism has had on psychoanalysis and whether its influence is a step forward or, alternatively, into the abyss.

POSTMODERNISM AND PSYCHOANALYSIS

The conventional perception is that postmodernism has influenced recent trends in psychoanalytic theory and technique, including

hermeneutics, social constructivism, relational theory, and intersubjectivity, that in turn constitute a paradigm-shift in traditional psychoanalytic thinking. This view is predicated on the assumption that Freudian psychoanalysis is rooted in an outdated, modernist view of the human condition based on a one-person paradigm that is derivative of a Cartesian egocentrism. Like the postmodern phenomenon itself, the label postmodern has been applied retrospectively to developments in psychoanalytic theory that were in evidence long before postmodernism emerged as an identifiable philosophical perspective. Generally speaking, any psychoanalyst who can be said to have challenged Freud's sexual model has been enlisted as representative of a new and postmodernist departure, including such disparate analytic thinkers as Sandor Ferenczi, Melanie Klein, Michael Balint, Ronald Fairbairn, D. W. Winnicott, Wilfried Bion, Heinrich Racker, and Jacques Lacan. This list of analysts, distinguished for having disagreed with Freud on this or that matter, continues to grow in the form of so-called contemporary Kleinians, contemporary representatives of the British Middle School, and contemporary French and South American psychoanalysts. This group has been joined by contemporary American psychoanalysts who are avowedly anti-Freudian and, hence, in opposition to ego psychology, a perspective brought to recent prominence by the late American analyst Stephen A. Mitchell, an erstwhile representative of the interpersonal school before conceiving (with Jay R. Greenberg) the relational perspective.

The relationship between postmodernist thinking and the recent emergence of anti-Freudian theories in America is unclear. Increasingly, proponents of relational or interpersonal perspectives, including but not limited to followers of Bion, have suggested that the “two-person” model is consistent with the postmodern turn in American and European cultures. I shall assess the validity of these claims below. In so doing, however, it would require more space than I have available to examine the efficacy of each psychoanalytic school in turn and assess whether and to what degree each has adopted postmodernist principles. Instead, I examine the relationship between postmodernism and Freudian psychoanalysis and describe those aspects of Freud’s model that anticipated the postmodern perspective and those aspects that are antithetical to it. I then review aspects of Freud’s model that are not necessarily consistent with postmodernism but are faithful to elements of Nietzsche’s philosophy as well as Heidegger’s. In conclusion, I leave it to the reader to determine whether postmodernism offers anything of substance for the future of psychoanalysis and whether the claims of two-person psychology are as innovative as its proponents assume.

I don’t believe anyone would disagree with the observation that Freud was a creature of the 19th-century fascination with everything scientific and that he passionately embraced science and its empirical proclamations. Yet Freud also possessed a sceptical temperament that was continuously at war with his scientific aspirations. I have documented the extent of Freud’s debt

to scepticism elsewhere (Thompson, 2000a, b) so I won't go into it here. Scepticism notwithstanding, there are features of Freud's basic theory that are antithetical to the Enlightenment's reliance on science and the certitude it aspired to, including: (1) his conception of the unconscious; (2) his adoption of the interpretative method; (3) the free association method; (4) analytic neutrality; and (5) the observation that it is impossible to affect a patient's condition through appeals to rational argument or coercion. All five criteria of Freud's theory are, as Barratt (1993) observes, postmodern in spirit. Moreover, all five are also sceptical, though it isn't clear where Freud obtained his insights or how. It has been documented that Freud was acquainted with the writings of Montaigne (Gilman, Birmele et al., 1994) and that he was familiar with Nietzsche's philosophy (Lehrer, 1995), both of which were imbued with a sceptic sensibility. But even if Freud made all his "discoveries" himself, as he claimed, it is reasonable to assume that he was predisposed to them due to his familiarity with scepticism, via one source or another. Thus, all the essential elements of Freud's psychoanalytic discoveries are consistent with the postmodern perspective as well as ancient scepticism. I shall now review the connections between Freud's discoveries and scepticism.

1. Freud's conception of the unconscious: This is a concept of mind that contemporary scientists emphatically reject. Although Freud wasn't the first to employ such a concept (von Hartmann and Nietzsche had already discussed the notion at

length), it was a radical concept when offered and brought considerable abuse against Freud from his medical, scientifically trained colleagues.^[8]

2. Freud's adoption of the interpretative method: Freud's interpretative method follows from his conception of the unconscious. It considers that the patient's speech acts are overdetermined and, as with Nietzsche, indicates that language is essentially metaphorical, so the meaning of what individuals say must be interpreted according to the context in which it is offered. Virtually all schools of psychoanalysis retain this model and have built on it, though Lacan and the hermeneutic school have been prominent in rethinking what interpretation consists of.

3. The free association method: Barratt (1993) and others argue that Freud's novel conception of the free association method is antithetical to an empiricist view of data-gathering and presaged a central tenet of the postmodern perspective, the view that language is more complex than previously imagined and that much of our communication with others occurs unconsciously. The so-called revolution in the postmodern critique of language (as consisting in language games) was anticipated by Nietzsche and is a feature of Heidegger's conception of language, which in turn influenced Lacan.^[9]

4. Analytic neutrality: Freud's conception of neutrality continues to be a source of controversy and contemporary analysts who are identified with the relational perspective (and sympathetic

with postmodernism) show a surprising antipathy to this technical principle, due to its alleged authoritarianism, i.e., the analyst's silence imbues him with an aura of aloofness that places the patient in a one-down position. In fact, this is the feature of Freud's treatment philosophy that was intended to *constrain* the analyst's authority, not inflate it. By Freud's definition, neutrality means nothing more than to adopt an attitude of sceptic, open-ended inquiry and never to impose one's views on the patient, but rather to allow patients to arrive at their own solutions in their own time—antiauthoritarianism in its essence.^[10]

5. The observation that it is impossible to affect a patient's condition through appeals to rational argument or coercion: Although this is not a technical principle, as such, this observation permeates the entirety of Freud's treatment philosophy and underlies all his technical principles. Although Freud began his medical career learning methods that were rooted in 19th-century empirical medical practices, he had the flexibility to profit from his errors and gradually abandoned conventional psychiatric methods in favor of what evolved into psychoanalysis. Whether Freud came upon these innovations on his own or derived them from others (e.g., Brentano, Schopenhauer, Montaigne, Nietzsche, and Plato and Aristotle), they are consistent with what are currently touted as features of postmodernism.

I have enumerated aspects of Freud's basic treatment philosophy that are both consistent with and anticipated elements of postmodernism, but

what about those aspects of Freud's treatment model that continue to be rooted in Enlightenment values, as his critics allege? There is little question that while Freud's treatment philosophy was a farsighted and monumentally influential method of relieving human suffering and revolutionized the way we currently conduct therapy, many of Freud's more fanciful theories were based on little more than his penchant for speculation and were often offered in a dogmatic fashion, sometimes alienating him from his most passionate disciples. The manner in which he offered interpretations to his patients was also frequently dogmatic, and Freud had a tendency to construe any rejection of his interpretations as resistance. Moreover, Freud's initial goal was to "cure" mental illness unequivocally in a manner that is reminiscent of the grand narratives found in Hegel, Marx, Kant, and other Modern philosophers. On the other hand, Freud's theories are not essential to his psychoanalytic method, which generations of innovators have subsequently demonstrated, so why fault him on his theory when one can substitute it with another, without sacrificing the principles on which the method relies? Moreover, Freud was never satisfied with his theories and revised them throughout his lifetime, whenever his experience indicated that reconsideration was warranted. In this, Freud was a tireless sceptic and toward the end of his life (1937/1964) came to the radical conclusion that a psychoanalytic cure of neurosis or any other form of suffering is impossible, due to the fluid nature of the human predicament and our sensitivity to unforeseen circumstances

that are liable to upset our equilibrium.

Indeed, the question of theory was not only a problem for Freud but continues to bedevil contemporary psychoanalysts as well. Were Freud a sceptic through and through he would have recognized that theories are superfluous to the psychoanalytic instrument he fashioned and he would have concluded that the aim of analysis is not knowledge but peace of mind. Yet, how many contemporary psychoanalysts (even postmodern thinkers) have abandoned theory, even those who claim the search for knowledge is an artifact of the Enlightenment? There continues to be something suspiciously dogmatic about contemporary psychoanalytic theorizing, whose alleged virtue is its “superiority” over Freud’s. But who, in the end, is able to judge who is right? It would serve the postmodernists well to take a page from the ancient sceptics who recognized that if knowledge is in the eye of the beholder, then it behooves us to abandon dogmatic claims entirely, including our self-certain condemnation of those with whom we disagree. Because the language and sensibility of postmodernism are essentially a French phenomenon, it shouldn’t be surprising that of all the psychoanalytic schools in the world it would appear to have had the most influence on the French, principally Lacanians but spilling over to other French analysts as well (e.g., Kristeva). Though Lacan’s theories continue to be fashionable in academic circles, his impact on American psychoanalysts has been minimal, even among those analysts who are sympathetic to postmodernism.^[11]

Unlike the French, the American analysts most taken with postmodernism tend to emphasize matters of technique over theory. Elliott and Spezzano (1998), for example, suggest that the work of Irwin Hoffman is postmodern due to his lack of certainty about what is going on between himself and his patients, in contrast to analysts who are more invested in determining what is allegedly happening in the unconscious of the analyst and in the unconscious of the patient. This is a point well taken and consistent with the sceptical outlook in contrast to the dogmatic assertions of previous generations of analysts. Similarly, the work of Schafer is said to be consistent with the postmodern perspective when Schafer questions whether patients should be characterized as “deceiving” themselves simply because the analyst sees it differently. Of course, these features of Hoffman’s and Schafer’s respective work could just as easily be characterized as existentialist in nature, so they are neither necessarily nor essentially postmodern.^[12] Elliott and Spezzano argue, however, that just because postmodernism embraces a relativistic and perspectivist framework (they maintain that “genuine” postmodernism only embraces perspectivism, a view that is inconsistent with the prevailing literature on the subject), that doesn’t necessarily imply that one interpretation is just as good as any other, a frequent criticism among analysts who reject postmodernism. Thus Elliott and Spezzano conceive of a form of “mitigated” postmodernism in contrast to the more radical position of so-called New Wave French psychoanalysts, a softening of the more extreme

European applications of postmodernism that is common among American analysts who identify with the relational perspective.

THE QUESTION OF INTERPRETATION

As noted earlier, the question of interpretation is of fundamental importance to Freud's conception of psychoanalysis, as well as to contemporary relational, intersubjective, constructivist, hermeneutic, and postmodernist perspectives. Freud was not alone in his tendency to treat interpretations as pronouncements from the gods, as though he could divine the truth of the matter by virtue of his superior intelligence. Indeed, most psychoanalysts have tended to treat interpretation as *translation* from the patient's utterances into a given theory of underlying reality instead of a means of "opening up" an otherwise closed area of discourse. It is surprising, however, that contemporary hermeneutic and constructivist models would imply that this more sceptical, allegedly postmodern take on the handling of interpretation is something new. Many of the existential psychoanalysts from the 1950s and 1960s (who were also critical of Freud in this respect) came to the same conclusion after integrating Heidegger's philosophy into their clinical perspective, evidenced in the publications of R. D. Laing (1960, 1969 [1961]), Ludwig Binswanger (1963), Medard Boss (1979), and a host of European psychoanalysts.^[13] Laing noted, for example, that Heidegger's conception of everyday experience *already presupposes* an act of

interpretation that, in turn, elicits one's capacity for getting to the heart of the matter, a conception of interpretation that has been noted by hermeneutically oriented psychoanalysts such as Donnel Stern (1997), derived from Heidegger's former pupil Hans Georg Gadamer. In Laing's (Laing, Phillipson & Lee, 1966) words:

Our experience of another entails a particular interpretation of his behavior. To feel loved is to perceive and interpret, that is, to experience, the actions of the other as loving [Hence] in order for the other's behavior to become part of [one's] experience, [one] must perceive it. *The very act of perception [and hence experience] entails interpretation*, (pp. 10-11) [Emphasis added]

In other words, everything analytic patients experience is the consequence of interpretations the patient has *already*, instinctively given himself which, in turn influence what a given patient is capable of taking in during the course of the analytic journey. What the analyst says to a patient is never actually "heard" in the way the analyst necessarily intends it to be, because it is *unconsciously interpreted* and, hence, experienced by the patient according to his or her interpretative schema, a culmination of everything an individual has previously endured and understood by such experiences in the course of a lifetime. In other words, analytic patients experience the world according to a personal bias that is resistant and often impervious to anything a patient encounters that contradicts it, such as an analyst's interpretations. The dogmatic nature of a person's views, held together by a lifetime of

neurotic impasse maneuvers, helps explain the difficulty patients experience when invited to question their most basic assumptions. Since both analyst and patient are always already instinctively interpreting everything each says to the other (but without necessarily realizing they are doing so), what is actually heard by each and in turn experienced is impossible to grasp directly, because every account of a person's experience entails the use of words that, when uttered, are immediately translated by the listener into a schema that the individual, whether analyst or patient, either wants to hear or expects to. This constantly changing interplay of speech, recognition, and misunderstanding accounts for the extraordinary difficulty analysts experience in their endeavor to converse with their patients and, in turn, understand them, because every attempt at communication is at the mercy of the patient's originary experience, the source of which is notoriously opaque. Because I can never *know* what a patient's experience is, I can only make a calculated guess as to what it might be, based more or less entirely on what the patient tells me.

Analysts who were influenced by Heidegger's hermeneutic theory of language often focus on the patient's tendency to deflect the analyst's efforts at understanding by resorting to self-deception and even overt deception. Analysts, in turn, are similarly prone to self-deception and subtle forms of coercion, a point exhaustively investigated by Laing (Thompson, 1998). For Heidegger, this characterizes merely one example of inauthenticity, which

was developed further by Sartre (1981) as well as Laing (1969). More recently, psychoanalysts who were influenced by Gadamer's development of hermeneutics are more likely to emphasize the difficulties encountered with any attempt at communication, and view the analytic situation as that of "unraveling" the inherent complexities of speech acts as they occur. The postmodern rejection of this thesis is based on the claim that self-deception is a myth because there is no standard of truth against which one is able to deceive and because there is no "self" to lie to. This criticism is also raised against Freud, who believed his patients were harboring secrets, so that the goal of analysis is one of determining what those secrets are. The fact that neither Heidegger, Gadamer, nor postmodernist thinkers believe that truth is objectively verifiable, however, doesn't negate the proposition (adopted by both Freud and Heidegger) that human beings are prone to deceive themselves about the nature and content of their experience, no matter how unreliable or objectively inaccurate one's experience may be. What counts is that patients believe in the veracity of what they deceive themselves (and others) about, so the resulting conflict is between opposing inclinations "in" oneself, which are in turn derived from a cleavage in the individual's relationship with the world. It seems to me that in their rejection of the premise of self-deception postmodernists have taken the terms "self," "deception" and "truth" literally, mistaking the organizing principle of subjectivity for a materialistic notion of the self.

Even the concept of resistance has become so controversial that some analysts (e.g., Schafer) have cast doubt on its efficacy altogether. Whether such views are consistent with postmodernism and how practical they are clinically I cannot say. There is an increasing tendency among analysts identified with the relational perspective to characterize the analytic relationship as one between equals, more or less collaborative in spirit, thus minimizing the tension that has traditionally characterized the patient's transference to the analyst. Yet none of these innovations are new, nor are they derived from the postmodern turn in contemporary culture. Matters of technique have been debated since the beginning of psychoanalysis, and there is a long history of disagreement between analysts who advocate a more authoritarian posture and those who opt for a "user-friendly" variety. While some analysts believe that technique should follow theory, others argue that practice is a creature of experience, a more sceptical position. I remain doubtful that recent so-called innovations in technique are anything new, whether or not they are consistent with the postmodern perspective. Psychoanalysis is such a flexible instrument that what finally matters is the person who employs it, not which theory or technical regime the analyst is educated to follow. Indeed, I would think this observation—that neither theory nor technique is essential to psychoanalysis—is postmodernism in its essence.

WHAT IS THE MATTER WITH POSTMODERNISM?

If there are positive components of postmodernism, what about those aspects of the postmodern turn that are irrelevant or even deleterious to the purposes of psychoanalysis? There is an expanding hegemony in the psychoanalytic world evidenced by a movement toward standardization that parallels similar developments in global commerce, the Internet, and the rapid disappearance of smaller, less orthodox psychoanalytic schools and organizations. The so-called global village, a quaint notion when the world was divided between the United States and the Soviet Union, now has the aura of a prison that encroaches on individualism and deviancy, if not eradicating them entirely. The decentering of the subject, while a compelling notion in theory, has fashioned a conception of the world not unlike that of the 1999 movie *The Matrix*, where individuals have become illusions, controlled by a vast network of computer intelligence in a not-too-distant, postapocalyptic future run amok.

In similar fashion, psychoanalysis has lost whatever edge it once enjoyed as a subversive element in society. Now it is part of the establishment — indeed, a tool of the “mental health professions,” whose conception of psychic deviancy is listed in a manual of diagnostic nomenclature that is the bible of every psychoanalytic practitioner.^[14] There is something ominous about the American conception of treatment, where mandatory universal licensure is all but inevitable, where any day now confidentiality between

patient and analyst will become an artefact of the past, along with other Enlightenment values that are suspect in an era of paranoia and suspicion. What role has the postmodern turn played in these developments? Does it question the efficacy of such values, or does it encourage them?

This is a difficult question to answer, because by rejecting universal values altogether the postmodern wears the mantle of an observer, neither cheering nor condemning cultural mores. Perhaps this version of neutrality can be reconciled with a perspective that decries authenticity in principle, but the postmodern abhorrence of authenticity is both surprising and telling—surprising because the authentic individual is not susceptible to the rewards of the people, and telling because it alerts us to the likelihood that, in its (alleged) rejection of values, postmodernism adopts values after all, but in the form of an anti-individualism that is ultimately suicidal. Indeed, there is something missing in the person who claims to be postmodern: for lack of a better word, a heart. With no leg to stand on, even its own, postmodernism as it is currently envisioned appears to define itself as a paradigm of spiritual emptiness, a cul-de-sac that is impervious to either passion or purpose. Having abandoned any vestige of selfhood or history, it depicts a world that is, perhaps contentedly, finally alienated from its own alienation.

A culture that rejects any semblance of authority or tradition cannot help but impact the role that psychoanalysis aspires to. Psychoanalysis has

always been the champion, par excellence, of the individual, a respite from the forces in every culture that demand obedience to the values adopted en masse. In this, psychoanalysis has offered a means to extricate oneself from such values (or at least to hold them in question) and to follow the beat of one's own drum, authenticity in its essence. Will psychoanalysis, like the culture at large, become a vehicle of the postmodern sensibility, or will it remain true to its original purpose, that of reconciling the individual to the muse of his own conscience?

Even if authenticity can be dismissed by postmodernism as just another value—whether universal, in the Nietzschean sense, or personally chosen, in the Heideggerian—psychoanalysis needs to advocate some sort of value that is, if not intrinsic to itself, then at least to the practitioner who wields it.

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Notes

[1] Nietzsche, however, used the idea of the unconscious descriptively, not topographically.

[2] Admittedly, Nietzsche was “in the air” in early-20th-century Vienna, and Otto Rank, who read passages of Nietzsche’s work to Freud’s circle, was the principal source of Freud’s acquaintance with Nietzsche’s philosophy. But Nietzsche was not a principal subject of philosophical debate until much later, when Heidegger cited Nietzsche as an important source of his thinking.

[3] See Thompson (2001) for a more thorough examination of Heidegger’s conception of Being.

[4] See Thompson (2000a; 2001) for a more exhaustive treatment of Heidegger’s conception of experience and the role it plays in his ontology.

[5] It soon became obvious to the Nazis and Heidegger alike that the the two had virtually nothing in common, and the more the Nazis learned about Heidegger’s philosophy the less they wanted any part of it. This was the reason they soon went their separate ways (see

Safranski, 1998, and Ott. 1993, for more on Heidegger's association with National Socialism).

- [6] These writings are the principal surviving source of ancient scepticism. See Mates (1996) for a translation and summary of Sextus's writings.
- [7] In fact scepticism, properly speaking, can be more aptly depicted as an outlook or perspective than a philosophy, since much of what sceptics question are the assumptions that philosophers employ.
- [8] See Thompson (1994) for a thorough discussion of Freud's aversion to the science of his day and the many parallels between his thought and Heidegger's.
- [9] See Thompson (1985. pp. 150-192) for a discussion of Lacan's debt to Heidegger's conception of Language. See also Wilden (1968).
- [10] I have written extensively on this to show that so-called classical Freudian technique originated with a group of American psychoanalysts in the 1950s and is fundamentally contrary to Freud's model. For more on this misunderstanding see Thompson (1996a; 2000b).
- [11] See Thompson (1985) for an assessment of Lacan's contemporary relevance and considerable debt to phenomenology, including Heidegger, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty.
- [12] See Thompson (1998, pp. 332-335) for more on aspects of Schafer's existentialist temperament.
- [13] See May, Angel, and Ellenberger (lids.) (1958) for a comprehensive selection of European psychiatrists and psychoanalysts who were influenced by Heidegger in the post-World War II era.
- [14] Notable exceptions are a smattering of Lacanian and Jungian institutes in Europe and North America, the phenomenologically oriented Philadelphia Association in London, and some affiliate organizations of the International Federation for Psychoanalytic Education (IFPE), based in the United States.

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