

Postmodern epistemology and the Christian apologetics of C S Lewis¹

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ABSTRACT

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Evangelicalism at the turn of this century finds itself facing a challenge that undermines its very validity. This challenge is generally referred to as postmodernism. Within the contemporary evangelical paradigm, the context in which this term is generally used refers to epistemology – the structure and limitations of human self-consciousness. The gist of the popular post-modernist argument is that human consciousness always develops inductively – from the inside, outward – utilising a particular linguistic and cultural frame of reference in order to construct conceptions of reality. Human self-consciousness, as understood from this context, is therefore always ultimately, something that can only be referred to as insulated. In the light of this, human self-consciousness can have no direct access to what may be commonly referred to as, an absolute truth.

It is this fundamental epistemological assumption of popular postmodernism that evangelical Christianity finds itself having to face up to. It amounts to, it would seem, a vital challenge to Christianity's very existence. In a so-called postmodern age, where multi-cultural tolerance is being increasingly called for, claims to any one particular world-view possessing *absolute truth* at the exclusion of any other is something to be frowned upon as being not only irrational, but also imperialistic, possibly even dangerous. It is here that conservative evangelicalism, the custodian of a supposed divinely revealed *kerugmatik* truth, is facing a prevailing *Zeitgeist* that is antagonistic to such religious *fundamentalism*. How is the evangelical school of Christianity to answer this challenge? Two recent developments in reaction to what is commonly referred to as

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postmodernism are evident. Some evangelicals are attempting to re-interpret and re-apply evangelical principles in order to accommodate the postmodern ethos. A second reaction to the Church's loss of confidence is a retreat from academic debate into what may be generally termed as mysticism.

In this essay, a central argument in the apologetics of C. S. Lewis is utilised by the writer. Lewis clearly demonstrated in his own times the inevitable self-contradiction that is implied in denying an objective standard of reference. Lewis also anticipated and even predicted a post-modernist age, when even the confident assumptions of his own modernistic era would be called into question. This essay will place C S Lewis in our postmodern context. This will be done in order to demonstrate – in the light of Lewis' anti-subjectivist argument – not only that such a popular postmodern epistemology is unable, upon critical examination, to demolish evangelical confidence in absolute truth, but that its own assertions stand upon unstable, possibly even upon dangerous grounds.

1 INTRODUCTION

In his 2000 publication, *Does God Believe in Atheists?* Blanchard (2000:200) describes the post-modern attitude to the concept of truth as follows:

Unlike Enlightenment based modernism, which sees history as rooted in meaning, post-modernism rejects both. For post-modern man there is no past and no future, there is only a perpetual and dominant present. Neither is there any foundations, fixed certainties or absolutes. Post-modernism utterly rejects the whole idea of a rational cohesive package.

It is argued that as human consciousness is inescapably bound up in a subjectivity of linguistic, cultural and environmental awareness, all human conception of truth will inevitably be seen through the lenses of ones' own personal experience. The reality of any particular individual is seen as a monad, in which truth has been constructed from the individual's experience, for the purpose of motivating desired and optimum behaviour.

Truth must be understood as *interpretation* rather than final declaration (Cupitt 1998:33, Horgan 2002:41). The very constitution of the human psyche seems to argue this point in this mind-set's

favour. Can a consciousness that has been culturally conditioned in a very specific manner do anything *but* approach its concept of truth (which is itself something subjectively discovered) in an entirely subjective manner? Popular post-modern epistemology argues emphatically, ‘no’. And it is because of this conviction that protagonists within the movement consider any objective ‘*truth claim*’ to be something *imperialistic* in nature (Horgan 2002:41), and something to be exposed as a domineering, manipulating play on power. Jean Francois Lyotard (certainly a pioneer of this mind-set) writes on this matter (1984:67):

It could (i.e. *logocentric* thinking) become the ‘dream’ instrument for controlling and regulating the market system, extended to include knowledge itself and governed exclusively by the performativity principle. In that case, it would inevitably involve the use of terror. But it could also aid groups discussing metaprescriptives by supplying them with the information they usually lack for making knowledgeable decisions.

This idea is often held to extend even to supposedly objective disciplines such as the physical sciences (Horgan 2002:247). Such concern for the *democratisation* of truth claims, and the protection of human development from *logocentric imperialism*, has motivated the more militant post-modernist protagonists to actively resist traditional Western claims of human access to any objective reality. Much of the post-modern resistance to Western *Logocentricity* takes place in the area of academia as well as education. Giroux, a post-modern educator, writes (Cahoone 1991:693):

The Enlightenment notion of reason needs to be reformulated within a critical pedagogy. First, educators need to be sceptical regarding any notion of reason that purports to reveal the truth by denying its own historical construction and ideological principles. Reason is not innocent and any viable notion of critical pedagogy cannot express forms of authority that emulate totalising forms of reason that appear to be beyond criticism and dialogue. This suggests that we reject claims to objectivity in favour of partial epistemologies that recognise the historical and socially constructed nature of their own knowledge claims and methodologies.

The final result of the above post-modern epistemology, is that the concept of an objective and absolute truth being accessible to the human mind is not only an incorrect conception, but is also a source of imperialistic domination of one particular group over another and therefore needs to be actively resisted (Rowlands 2003:184). *Logocentric* reasoning is inevitably imperialistic. But if this is the case, what alternative system may be offered in its place? The general answer to this question is *a philosophical mindset of cooperation – of inter-subjectivity*. Post-modern contention is that truth is not an existent *thing in itself*, but rather an instrument necessary in the assembling of human value constructs that enable people to function as self-aware and social beings (Cahoone 1996:3). Reality is therefore to be constructed by the individual independent of *logocentric* authority, according to linguistic and cultural conceptions and value. DeLashmut and Braund write (McCallum 1996:99):

According to Post-modernism, educators are biased facilitators and co-constructors of knowledge. If all reality exists not ‘out there’ but only in the minds of those who perceive it, then no one can claim authority. All versions of truth are merely human creations. Educators, whether classroom teachers, researchers, or textbook authors, are not objective, legitimate authorities. Instead they view educational activities from their own constructed, biased perspective, and therefore have no privileged relationship to the truth. Ruth Zuzovsky points out the startling implications of this radical constructivist viewpoint: the knowledge constructed by learners, teachers or scientists are *all of equal worth!*

The above approach to post-modern conceptions of truth can be recognised in much of contemporary academic exercise (Cahoone 1996:20). It is at this point that I need to *narrow down* my present discussion to the confines of evangelical Christianity and the impact that popular post-modernism is having upon its thought and methodology. The above post-modern attitude to ‘*truth*’ impacts profoundly upon the very foundation of evangelical Christianity, which traditionally claims to exist as a witness to, as well be as a custodian of, an objective and ultimate reality – the *kerugma*. This reality it refers to as *truth* (Hodge 1991:20).

2 CONFSSIONAL CHRISTIANITY AND THE POST-MODERN MINDSET

An increasing loss of the Church's traditional influence in society is now predicted by many in the evangelical school (Codrington 1999:131). With the decline of Western modernistic confidence at the turn of the twenty-first century, objective dogmatism is not only doubted, but in many circles, openly frowned upon (Blanchard 2000:232). This has resulted in a negative impact upon Christianity as a religion of dogmatic confession. The general concern in academic evangelical circles today, is often connected with the plight its own devaluation in a world of multi-culturalism. In a society where any dogmatic claims to absolute truth are frowned upon as being *logocentric*, intolerant, and imperialistic (Brooke 1998:56), the idea of all faiths possessing equal and ontological validity is demanded. And yet such a concept is absolutely alien to the message of orthodox Christianity. Blanchard writes (2000:226):

There are obviously social and moral issues on which the followers of different religions can usefully unite, but this can hardly validate their religion, because there are issues on which the same stance could be taken by many atheists. To illustrate this very simply, and at a personal level, an act of kindness by an atheist is just as valuable to the beneficiary as one performed by a theist, but it is a long way from saying that all religions are essentially the same. The simple fact is that all religions *cannot* be the same. To be so, they would need to be united on the very issues on which they are most widely divided: the existence and nature of God.

With the prevailing post-modern *Zeitgeist* widely influencing religious thinking, evangelical Christianity is being pressured into either reinterpreting its previously held exclusivist and proselytising stance, or in a reactionary manner, to withdraw from academia and resort to mystical and occultic justification for its existence (Horton 1993:265).

Within evangelical circles it is evident that some evangelical thinkers regard themselves as being pressured into re-defining their particular world-view in order to accommodate post-modern epistemological pre-suppositions. An example of this response to

post-modern effect upon evangelical Christianity may be demonstrated from the following quotation of Codrington 1999:131):

Post-modernism is the context in which we will work to a greater extent as the years roll on. Young people who come to faith need help recognising the current worldview for what it is – not always helpful, but definitely there. They need to be taught ‘faith development skills’ which takes nurture, resources, relationships and professionals. Faith development skills are about making faith work, answering questions, helping young people understand why God’s word says what it says, and how to apply the obvious and work out the implied. It means taking serious the experiential and the cognitive – not merely answering, ‘it is the Bible, and so its true’ – but rather, ‘it is the Bible because its true and best and it works.

Codrington is saying here that in the ethos of our present post-modern era, Christian leaders need to adapt appropriately by means of re-structuring their traditional dogmatic and declarative evangelistic methodology and replacing it with an evangelism that appeals more to the existential and the pragmatic. Such calls from within the evangelical camp itself to a necessary *restructuring* are now commonly heard (Foshaugen 2001:88), and can also be witnessed in various novel methodologies now witnessed in the contemporary evangelical world (Horton 1992:269, McCallum 1996:199). An example of the above paradigm shift has been witnessed at the 2004 Baptist Union of Southern Africa General Assembly held in Stellenbosch. An officially sponsored seminar was offered (and was well supported) on how to *post-modernise* pastoral methodologies and messages within the Union churches.

3 HOW WOULD C S LEWIS RESPOND TO THE POST-MODERN CHALLENGE?

It is interesting to note that although C S Lewis died about two decades before the birth of the post-modern movement, he fully anticipated its eventual arrival. In his 1947 book *Miracles*, he writes (1990:110):

Men became scientific because they expected Law in Nature, and they expected Law in Nature because they believed in a Legislator. In most modern scientists this

belief has died: it will be interesting to see how long their confidence in uniformity survives it. Two significant developments have already appeared – the hypothesis of a lawless sub-nature and the surrender of the claim that science is true. We may be living nearer than we suppose to the end of the scientific age.

It is evident that Lewis knew full well what the foundational premise would be of the eventual successor to modernism – the denial of objectivity. The entire post-modern ethos may be verbally encapsulated in these words. The post-modern argument, on philosophical grounds, seems irrefutable. It cannot be denied that all systematic human thinking begins and ends as subjective experience. It is also an undeniable fact that any human conception of reality believed to be outside of subjective experience must inevitably be conceptualised through the *lenses* of that particular subjective experience (Cahoone 1996:21). Further, in the light of the previous two sentences, it must be admitted that any claim to a human accessibility to a reality that is absolute in nature (i.e. *truth*) is an epistemological absurdity (Brooke 1998:14). *Truth claims*, also, to post-modern thinking, are to be resisted in principle as being imperialistic *power-plays* (Cahoone 1996:51), which are able to be used by the oppressor to rule over and dominate the oppressed (McCallum 1996:12). From what has been written above, we may infer two main contentions in the post-modern position on truth; firstly, truth, as it exists outside of human conscious subjectivity, is absolutely inaccessible (Cupitt 1998:23). Any human conception of truth must be recognised as being, at best, merely *interpretive* in nature. Secondly, that any absolute *truth claim*, is ultimately motivated by political, economic, or social dominance (Horgan 2002:47), and this, for moral reasons, should be resisted (Cahoone 1996:693).

This poses a profound challenge to the Christian faith, more especially to evangelicalism, which exists on the claim of being a custodian of revealed truth. The dilemma that post-modernism presents to evangelicalism is this; either it must deny and resist post-modern epistemological claims (and to do this would amount to retreating from reasonable argument) by appealing to a mystical irrationality, or it must make its doctrinal content more compatible to post-modern epistemology. It would appear at face value, that there can be no possible *third option* out of the dilemma, I believe

however, that there is. The apologetics of C S Lewis supplies a rational and philosophically sound answer to the post-modern epistemological dilemma on access to truth.

Lewis' argument for truth's objective accessibility is a positive one. It is grounded in the *derivative* and *dependent* nature of human experience to the *cosmos* that is exterior to it. Human thought, Lewis argued, always presupposes a prior frame of reference that underlines its very exercise. For example, time, three-dimensional space, matter, in its various forms, energy, in its various modes, all *pre-exist* and *pre-determine* the conscious mind's functioning process. As a mould pre-determines the figure moulded, so the human mind is inseparably related to the cosmos that has formed and regulated it. Consequentially, human consciousness corresponds in an intimate and related manner with the universe that it experiences. This cannot be denied. Even a deluded madman thinks in terms of 'me' and 'you' – 'when' and 'how' – all of these words being derived from the three-dimensional, cosmic source. Lewis (1991b:88) writes:

To understand that logic must be valid is to see at once that this thing we all know, this thought, this mind, cannot in fact be really alien to the nature of the universe. Or putting it the other way round, the nature of the universe cannot be really alien to reason. We find that matter always obeys the same laws, which our logic obeys. When logic says a thing must be so, Nature always agrees. No one can suppose that this can be due to some happy coincidence.

In an article entitled, "Religion without Dogma" Lewis (1991a:95) writes:

The validity of rational thought, accepted in an utterly non-naturalistic, transcendental (if you will), supernatural sense, is the necessary presupposition of all other theorising. There is simply no sense in beginning with a view of the universe and trying to fit the claims of thought on at a later stage. By thinking at all we have claimed that our thoughts are more than mere natural events. All other propositions must be fitted in as best they can round that primary claim.

In an article entitled, “Bulverism”, Lewis (1985:18) writes:

Everything that I know is an inference from sensation (except the present moment). All our knowledge of the universe beyond our immediate experiences depends on inferences from these experiences. If our inferences do not give a genuine insight into reality then we can know nothing. A theory cannot be accepted if it does not allow our thinking to be a genuine insight, nor if the fact of our knowledge is not explicable in terms of that theory.

To deny that human thinking is derived from, and dependent upon its very mould and life-support is to argue extreme *solipsism*, and there are few post-modernists that would, I think, go that far. But if it is to be conceded that there must be an intimate *inter-weaving* dialectic of some kind that is existing between the objective *cosmos* and subjective human consciousness, then, Lewis would argue, this constitutes a solution to the question of human access to objective reason. The subjective, conscious consideration of its own relationship with that which structures and sustains it, constitutes a human experience of resonant and objective. Lewis (1990:35) explains:

In other words, wherever there is real progress in knowledge, there is some knowledge that is not superseded. Indeed, the very possibility of progress demands that there should be an unchanging element. New bottles for new wine by all means: but not new palates, throats, and stomachs, or it would not be for us ‘wine’ at all. I take it we should all agree to find this sort of unchanging element in the simple rules of mathematics.

The human experience of thought, in other words, is related to the cosmos, to use an analogy, as a *reflection* is related to its *substance*. As a mirror’s reflection may be unclear and distorted in its reflecting, it remains a derivative of, and comparable with, the form that is casting the reflection. This very position, is used by the theologian Emil Brunner in his systematic theology in order to illustrate the significance of the theological term, *Imago Dei* (Brunner 1966:55). Lewis argues that this co-relationship between the thinker and the thinker’s life-supporting frame of reference, is an essential clue to the validity of at least *some measure* of objectivity

in human thinking. He writes (1990b:89), 'Where thought is strictly rational, it must be in some odd sense, not ours, but cosmic or super cosmic.' And it is at this stage that I am personally convinced (and I believe Lewis would point it out), that post-modern epistemology betrays a significant flaw in its argument. Post-modern epistemology fails to recognise, the ontological *duality* of human rational experience. Both *substance* and its *reflection* are confounded together as one in their contention. The *reflection* in other words, denies any significant and measurable conscious awareness of its *substance*. Post-modern epistemology begins and ends exclusively, it seems, with the subjectivity of the thinker, and from this starting-point (quite rightly), denies any possible cognitive access to anything that may be exterior to that. Lewis would challenge the contention at this point as being unreasonably reductionist in nature. The Lewisian challenge may not be taken seriously by those who would insist upon a totally solipsist epistemology, but this being the case, a philosophical consistency is called for. Lewis '*bolts the escape routes*' for those who would deny any objectivity in thinking and yet insist upon '*proving their point*' in a rational manner. He writes (Lewis 1991a:102) to those who would suggest that they are able to construct rational arguments, which contend for the irrationality of human minds:

Let us strip it of the illegitimate power it derives from the word 'stagnation' with its suggestion of puddles and mantled pools. If water stands too long it stinks. To infer thence that whatever stands long must be unwholesome, is to be a victim of metaphor. Space does not stink because it preserved its three dimensions from the beginning. The square on the hypotenuse has not gone mouldy by continuing to equal the sum of the squares of the other two sides...except on the supposition of a changeless standard, progress is impossible...We can go on getting a sum more and more nearly right only if the one perfectly right answer is 'stagnant'.

It is at this stage of Lewis' argument for the validity of objectivity in thinking that a crucial and often seemingly unconsidered point is raised. Is it *really* possible for a person who denies on epistemological grounds, any validity in any objective truth claims, to actually make such a claim in the first place? Lewis (1990b:26) writes:

You may if you like, give up all claims to truth. You may say simply, 'our way of thinking is useful – without adding, even under your breath, and therefore true.' It enables us to set a bone and build a bridge and make a Sputnik. And that is good enough. The old high pretensions of reason must be given up. It is a behaviour evolved entirely as an aid to practice. That is why when we use it simply for practice, we get along pretty well; but when we fly off into speculation and try to get general views of 'reality' we end in endless, useless, and probably merely verbal disputes of the philosopher... Goodbye to all that. No more theology, no more ontology, no more metaphysics... But then equally no more Naturalism. For of course, Naturalism is a prime specimen of that towering speculation discovered from practice and going far beyond experience which is now being condemned.

Lewis points out here, the absurdity in the reasoning of a person who claims not to believe in objective reason. It would seem that the debunkers of the validity of objective reason are totally dependent themselves upon an objective rationality in order to argue their own point! Lewis (1990b:84) writes:

There is therefore no question about a total scepticism about human thought. We are always prevented from accepting total scepticism because it can be formulated only by making a tacit exception of the thought we are thinking at the moment – just as the man warns the newcomer 'Don't trust anyone in this office' always expects you to trust him at that moment. Whatever happens then, the most we can do is to decide that certain types of human thought are 'merely' human or subjective, and others not. However small the class, some class of thoughts must be regarded not as mere facts about the way human brains work, but as true insights, as the reflection of reality in human consciousness.

It is here that post-modern epistemology still needs to, within a defensible paradigm, explain its motivation and justify its epistemological claims. It would seem that an epistemology that denies any access to rational objectivity has denied itself, by its very

own contention, the right to make any objectively rational claims at all, and yet, surprisingly, this is what is being done.

a) The Post-modern Epistemological Argument Syllogistically Summarised

PREMISE ONE: Human self-consciousness consists entirely of cultural/linguistic programming.

PREMISE TWO: Human self-consciousness has no access to any reality outside of cultural/linguistic programming.

CONCLUSION: There can be absolutely no human access to any objective truth, and therefore all *metanarrative* truth claims are invalid.

b) The Epistemological Answer of C. S. Lewis Syllogistically Summarised

PREMISE ONE: All propositional claims, according to post-modern epistemology, are ultimately subjective, and therefore, invalid as objective statements.

PREMISE TWO: The above applies also to the claim of the first premise.

CONCLUSION: The post-modern epistemological claim above refutes its own first premise, and is therefore rendered invalid.

Post-modernist Lawrence Cahoon simply dismisses the above objection without answering it. He (Cahoon 1996:21) writes:

The charge of self-contradiction is an important one; nevertheless, it is a purely negative argument that does nothing but blunt the criticisms post-modernism makes of traditional inquiry. The sometimes obscure rhetorical strategies of post-modernism make sense if one accepts its critique of such inquiry. To say then that the post-modern critique is invalid because the kind of theory it produces does not meet the standards of traditional or normal inquiry is a rather weak counter-attack.

What Cahoon is saying here, is that the philosophical validity of post-modern epistemology is of a lesser importance (and therefore not necessary to validate) than the practical value that its premises and methodologies have in effectively criticising modernistic pre-

suppositions. It is my own conviction that the above statement represents post-modern reluctance to consistently theorise and its appeal to philosophical orthopraxy above philosophical orthodoxy. The reason why Cahoone claims that the above argument is, '*a rather weak counter attack*', is because he is assuming that post-modernism is under no compulsion to meet any preconditioned accreditation standards of '*traditional*' and '*normal enquiry*', but is this really so? In the following point, the epistemology of C S Lewis will put this assumption to the test.

Consequential to post-modern scepticism regarding human access to any absolute truth, is the conviction that all experienced reality needs to be constructed and filtered into a particular coherent and systematised world-view in order for not only psychological stability, but also social stability to be ensured (Rowlands 2003:194). It is accepted that as the human being is not regulated instinctively, the imposition of an extra-sentient regulator of behaviour is necessary (Cahoone 1996:693). On the other hand, because human experience has no access to any extra-sentient absolute, it is linguistic and cultural programming that imposes a reality and value system (McCallum 1996:97). Truth, in other words, is for an individual, something that has been constructed linguistically and culturally (Cupitt 1998:22). In the light of this fact, many post-modern facilitators and educators consider it their particular task in the post-modern world, to impose such values upon their subjects that would ensure optimum psychological and social effect. Negative anti-social values such as prejudice, intolerance, competition, and criminality, need to be *conditioned out* of an individual living in an increasingly multi-cultural and transforming society. Post-modern educational theorist Henry A Giroux writes (Cahoone 1991:687):

Critical pedagogy needs a language that allows for competing solidarities and political vocabularies that do not reduce the issues of power, justice, struggle, and inequality to a single script, a master narrative that suppresses the contingent, historical, and the everyday as a serious object of study. This suggests that curriculum knowledge not be treated as a sacred text but developed as part of an ongoing engagement with a variety of narratives and traditions that can be re-read and re-formulated in politically different terms. At issue here is constructing a discourse of textual authority that is power

sensitive and developed as part of a wider analysis of the struggle over culture fought out at the level of curricula knowledge, pedagogy, and the exercise of institutional power.

This post-modern educational ideal is to impose a value-system upon its learners that ensure optimum psychological and social behaviour in the new multi-cultural global *village* (McCallum 1996:33). The glaring failures of Western civilisation to ensure justice, equality and world peace motivate such sentiment (Cupitt 1998:80). The ideological basis underlying post-modern thinking is therefore justified by its protagonists by reference to the inequalities that are abundantly inherent in the social systems of industrialised Western world with its modernistic ideological re-enforcement. David Hall (1991:58) writes:

Any serious claim to objective truth involves us in insisting that reality shine through our assertions. The very being of things is present in one's theory or ideology. Our age is altogether too suspicious of such claims. The pluralism of doctrines and theories within a single culture such as ours, as well as the pluralism of cultures, makes any claim to the truth of things an implicitly political act. Dogmatism, totalitarianism, and narrow intolerance are all directly connected with unjustified claims to final truth.

We see here the way in which the post-modern sociologist connects injustice and imperialism with the supposedly incorrect belief in human access to absolute truth. John McGowan (1991:19), in his work entitled, *Post-modernism and its Critics* writes:

Western reason's fundamental attachment to the law of non-contradiction can thus be seen as based on the instrumental utility of that principle in the attempt to assert control. The repression of contradiction both within the self and within the social body favours integrity and unanimity over difference and multiplicity.

Post-modern social theory therefore seeks to dismantle modernistic absolutes in order to establish a world of eventual contentment, tolerance and inter-cultural cooperation (Horgan 2002:47, Cupitt 1998:161). In order to achieve this goal, Western *arrogance* and domination, needs to be devalued and put on a par with other,

equally valid world-views (Lyotard 1991:64). Educational theorist Gary DeLashmut describes the intention and process (McCallum 1996:11):

Better self-esteem, post-modernists argue, can only come when schools empower those who traditionally had very little power, that is, minorities and women. Efforts to advance empowerment of students is seen as a movement called 'critical pedagogy'. The goal of critical pedagogy is to empower those who have been pushed to the margins of society, who therefore have had little say in what ideas and practices count as legitimate and worthwhile. Critical educators work not to remove politics and ideology from education, but rather to make power relations more equal between the diverse groups in society. their goal is to equalise the relationships in the education community so that the oppressed people have the freedom and the power to overcome oppression and pursue lifestyles of their choosing.

It is doubtful if anybody in his or her sound mind would consider such ideological intention as being something ignoble or irrelevant. The post-modern sociologist's dream is one of *equalisation* and *freedom of choice* (Cahoone 1996:20). To many contemporary thinkers, the post-modern mindset is the key that will open up for humanity a *brave new world* of harmony. Pioneer post-modern sociologist Daniel Bell (1976:xxii) writes:

A post-industrial transformation provides no 'answers'. It only establishes new promises and new powers, new constraints and new questions - with the difference that these are now on a scale that has never been imagined previously in world history.

It is certainly not the present writer's intention to trivialise or even to disagree with such post-modern ideological sentiment. However, because post-modern epistemology emphatically denies any possible human access to reality exterior to subjective experience, a fundamental philosophical discrepancy flaws their ideal. It is at this point that it is again necessary to bring in the epistemology of C S Lewis in order to critically dialogue post-modern ideology. It may be remembered that not only Lewis, but the titan philosopher Immanuel Kant had argued for the possibility of some human access to *extra-*

conscious reality, due to what has been termed the *Categorical Imperative* – that is, an intuitive human awareness of a universal and categorical *right* and *wrong*. Lewis (1991b:78) writes, ‘Kant was perfectly right at that point at least: the imperative is categorical. Unless the ethical is assumed from the onset, no argument will bring you to it.‘If there is, as both Kant and Lewis contend, an overarching ethical imperative, that is, some norm of value that is universally and categorically recognised, then it is perfectly legitimate for one to desire the imposition of a universal justice, tolerance and equality. To desire an end to oppression and prejudice, and to devise ways and means of ensuring a better world for all, however, can only be universally legitimate, as long as a categorical imperative is firstly recognised. And it is here that post-modern ideology, based upon a subjectivity, finds itself unjustified. Lewis, in his 1943 lectures later published as a book entitled, *The Abolition of Man*, terms the *categorical imperative*, the *Tao*. He used this Chinese concept in order to demonstrate that the Categorical Imperative is not merely a Western construct. In this book, he anticipates the arrival of a post-scientific mindset (some thirty years before it came about). C S Lewis scholar, Walter Hooper considers this particular work to be the finest piece of Christian apologetics ever written (Lewis 1977:65) Lewis (1977:32) writes in prophetic anticipation of post-modern epistemology:

You say we shall have no values at all if we step outside the Tao. Very well: we shall probably find that we can get on quite comfortably without them. Let us regard all ideas of what we *ought* to do simply as an interesting psychological survival: let us step right out of all that and start doing what we like. Let us decide for ourselves what man is to be and make him into that: not on any ground of imagined value, but we want him to be such. Having mastered our environment, let us now master ourselves and choose our own destiny.

The thesis of Lewis’ above book, is that nothing ethical or moral in human behaviour may be expected or demanded, unless it is firstly universally agreed that a related categorical imperative exists. Ethics is *a paradigm, a language game, a system*, that has to be submitted to before any claim of *right* or *wrong* can be considered universally legitimate. In the light of this, Lewis has vital relevance to the

present debate on post-modernism and epistemology. He (Lewis 1991:78) writes:

I deny that we have any power to make a new ethical system. I assert that whatever and whenever ethical discussion begins, we have already before us an ethical code whose validity has to be assumed before we can even criticise it. For no ethical attack on any of the precepts can be made except on the ground of some other traditional precept. You can attack the concept of justice because it interferes with the feeding of the masses, but you have taken the feeding of the masses from the world-wide code. You may exalt patriotism at the expense of mercy; but it was the old code that told you to love your country. You may vivisect your grandfather in order to deliver your grandchildren from cancer: but take away the traditional morality, and why should you bother about your grandchildren?

Lewis here asks a crucial question – on what ground can a person, who has been denied the access to any objectivity, expect or demand a desired and universal optimum objective? To be more definitive and in context with our present discussion, what legitimate *right* do post-modern theologians, educators and sociologists have to restructure values in order to establish a more ‘just’ and ‘free’ society? What are the *grounds* for this post-modern ideology? Lewis (1977:21) writes:

The important point is not the precise nature of their end, but the fact that they have an end at all...and this end must have real value in their eyes. To abstain from calling it ‘good’ and to use instead, such predicates as, ‘necessary’ or ‘progressive’ or ‘efficient’ would be a subterfuge. They could be forced to answer the question, ‘necessary for what?’, ‘progressing towards what?’, ‘effecting what?’; in the last resort they would have to admit that some state of affairs was in their opinion good for its own sake. And this time they could not maintain that ‘good’ simply described their own emotion about it.

The post-modern response to this challenge, seems to be that ethical and even rational imperatives need not be, as traditionally claimed, something *extra-human*, but may just as well be justified along

pragmatic grounds, made valid by consensus (McCallum 1996:41). In other words, the prevailing mindset of a particular culture decides what *right* and *wrong* means, on purely pragmatic grounds. Pioneer post-modernist, Alasdair Macintyre (1984:204) writes:

In what does the unity of an individual life consist? The answer is that its unity is the unity of a narrative embodied in a single life (i.e. existential authenticity). To ask, ‘what is good for me?’ is to ask how best I might live out that unity and bring it to completion. To ask, ‘what is good for man?’ is to ask what all answers to the former question must have in common. But now it is important to emphasise that it is the systematic asking of these two questions and the attempt to answer them in deed as well as in word which provide the moral life with its unity.

In other words, where it may be asked, ‘by what standard does post-modernism decide a *right* or a *wrong* proposition or action?’ Macintyre (somebody who is widely acknowledged to be representative of post-modern epistemology) would answer, ‘Right and wrong are measured by the maximum *good* or *bad* effecting existential authenticity on a social level.’ Charles Jencks (1984:20) explains that post-modern values are justified as long as they, ‘...will support relative absolutism, or fundamental holism, which insists on the developing and jumping nature of scientific growth, and the fact that all propositions of truth are time-and-context sensitive.’ What this means, is that post-modern values are considered as being *valid*, as long as they fall agreeably within, and can be justified by the paradigm of social post-modern ideal. It is therefore, an *inter-subjective* consensus that justifies and vindicates, to post-modernity, what is *right* and *wrong*, *true* and *false*.

But this answer to our challenge is insufficient to satisfy a critical and consistent inquirer. If it is merely inter-subjective pragmatic consensus that decides what is, and what is not, *real* and *false*, *good* and *bad*, then a crucial question may be asked. Lewis (1977:38) writes ‘The conditioners then, are to chose what kind of artificial *Tao* they will, for their own good reasons, produce in the human race. They are the motivators, the creators of motives. But how are they going to be motivated themselves?’ He (Lewis 1991:72) writes in an address entitled *On Ethics*:

Let us suppose for the purpose of argument, that there really is an 'instinct' (in whatever sense) to preserve civilisation, or the human race. Our instincts are obviously in conflict. The satisfaction of one demands the denial of another. And obviously, the instinct, if there is one, to preserve humanity is the one of all others whose satisfaction is likely to entail the greatest frustration of my remaining instincts. My hunger and thirst, my sexual desires, my family affections, are all going to be interfered with. And remember, we are still supposed to be in the vacuum, outside all ethical systems. On what conceivable ground, in an ethical void, on the assumption that the preservation of the species is not a moral but merely an instinctive end, can I be asked to gratify my instinct for the preservation of the species by adopting a moral code? Why should this instinct be preferred to all my others? It is certainly not my strongest.

If human consciousness is entirely subjective in its epistemological nature, and is ethically motivated either by instinctive or arbitrary social selection, then in the final analysis, the words *ethically right* or *wrong*, cannot have any single *real* meaning in them at all. Ultimately to this mindset, all human action must finally be arbitrary in nature. Lewis (1991:108) writes in an article entitled, *The Poison of Subjectivism*:

If 'good' means only the local ideology, how can those who invent the local ideology be guided by any idea of good themselves? The very idea of freedom presupposes some objective moral law which overarches rulers and ruled alike. Subjectivism about values is eternally incompatible with democracy. We and our rulers are of one kind only so long as we are subject to one law. But if there is no law of Nature the *ethos* of any society is the creation of its rulers, educators, and conditioners; and every creator stands above and outside his own creation.

The post-modern epistemological claim that each individual cultural consensus is sufficient to justify the words, *right* and *wrong*, does not ring true upon critical examination.

4 CONCLUSION

Post-modern thinking, in this regard, to my knowledge, has not as yet addressed the above question. It becomes apparent to a perhaps morbid and paranoid thinker, that here, with popular post-modern epistemology, we have the opportunity for a perfect *Big Brother* scenario. A scenario where arbitrary values and imperatives are imposed upon a plastic and uncritical society. Such potential mind-control would make the propaganda machine of Nazi Germany or Maoist Communist China seem relatively democratic. Lewis (1977:48) writes:

To reduce the *Tao* to a mere natural product is a step of that kind. Up to that point, the kind of explanation which explains things away may give us something, though at a heavy cost. But you cannot go on 'explaining away' forever: you will find that you have explained explanation itself away. You cannot go on 'seeing through' things forever. The whole point of seeing through something is to see something through it. It is good that the window should be transparent, because the street or garden beyond it is opaque. How if you saw through the garden too? It is no use trying to see through first principles. If you see through everything, then everything is transparent. But a wholly transparent world is an invisible world. To 'see through' all things is the same as not to see.

To 'see through' something here, refers to the debunking and denying of extra-human imperatives that have been traditionally believed to stand over/against human consciousness as an objectivity. The 'first principles' that he mentions above are the categorical imperatives that have been held to by civilisation since its inception. Lewis raises two potent arguments against the post-modern understanding of truth as construct.

Firstly, he points out the fact that the values and ideology of post-modernism have been, as it were, 'borrowed' from the traditional value system. To ask the question, why justice and equality are the objectives of post-modern ideology can only be answered in an arbitrary way if the post-modernist is to remain consistent to a sceptical epistemology.

Secondly, there is an implicit danger in considering reality as construct. It logically and inescapably follows from the post-modern epistemological value system, that the Nazi persecution and attempted extermination of Judaism was justifiable, as long as such action was understood as being a paradigmatic cultural consensus. If we are to consistently follow popular post-modern epistemology, then there can be nothing to prevent, in a future era, the birth of a culturally consented paradigm that frowns upon what we now know as justice, and welcomes cruelty and vice in its place. There can never be such a thing as a unique and universally categorical – *post-modern ethics*. It needs to be noted therefore, that the post-modern values that are supposedly derived from its own epistemology turn out to be the very same values of traditional ethics.

It would appear from the examination of evident post-modern ideological motivations (i.e. justice, equality, freedom of choice), that their ethical and moral assumptions are fundamentally the same as those held by traditional morality. There is no alternative ethical behavioural code that can be discovered in post-modernism. The mindset initiates in its system, *nothing whatsoever* that is novel, and has been derived from something *outside* of traditionally recognised morality. Consistent and honest observation will reveal that post-modern values are derived from, and dependent on, the very same overarching morality that previous philosophical systems have simply taken for granted. Once this has been admitted however, then the post-modern claim to be exempt from the traditional restrictions of logic and rationality is proven void. Evangelical absolutes are certainly not demolished by this mind-set. The above argument is an encapsulation of the refutation of a mindset that was not yet even in existence (but only in its seminal form) when developed by C S Lewis!

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