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Modern and Postmodern Ways of Knowing:  
Implications for Therapy and Integration

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Despite significant resistance, psychology is being dragged into the postmodern era. While many debate whether the postmodern era has officially begun, others argue that the postmodern era has already past by. This said, the emergent consensus is that these are postmodern times. Much of contemporary Western culture and academia is beginning to embrace this paradigm shift, though the field of psychology is still trying to establish itself as a modernist science. Ironically, psychology's attempt to identify itself in modernistic terms may leave psychology out of touch with the culture it is trying to influence (Hoffman, 2004a). We submit that psychology and the religious integration<sup>1</sup> movement need to begin addressing the issues of postmodernism or else face irrelevance. Through this paper, we will place postmodernism in a broader context by critically examining its history. From this basis, we will recommend means for embracing postmodern thought in the integration movement and discuss implications for practice.

In making such a pronouncement, the question of how integration is defined seems an important issue. However, we have chosen to follow the lead of Sorenson (2004a) who states, "integration means different things to different people" (p. 181). This paper will reflect different approaches to how integration is understood. Avoiding the confinement of labeling integration is a form of embracing more of a postmodern approach through allowing for greater adaptability of this term.

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<sup>1</sup> Because this paper will be talking about more than one type of integration and more than one integration movement, we will use the term *religious integration* to specifically refer to the broad movement or tradition of theorists, researchers, and schools who have placed the dialogue between psychology and religion (most frequently Christianity) at the forefront of their concern.

### Postmodernism in Context: A Brief History of Thought

We maintain a limited historical perspective fuels much of the current debate regarding postmodern thought, especially within religious circles. To address this, we begin by briefly journeying through a history of intellectual thought. In so doing, we state upfront that any such overview necessitates many overgeneralizations and oversimplifications. For example, ways of knowing now labeled modern and postmodern existed during premodern times while many premodern philosophies are still influential today. Thus, we interpret the three historical epochs of premodern, modern, and postmodern as paradigms or schemas that coexist; within specific historical context, cultures tend to privilege one of the three over the other. Western societies currently are transitioning the modern to the postmodern paradigm as dominant. Note that this perspective is consistent with Kuhn's (1970) view of paradigms. Certain approaches to epistemology prevailed in each of these developmental periods. While differences between these periods go well beyond epistemology, other themes typically relate back to this central question of how we know what we know. Figure 1 provides a brief timeline of major historical events marking the three periods as well as transitions between them.

Table 1.

Summary of Premodernism, Modernism, and Postmodernism

	Premodernism	Modernism	Postmodernism
Time Period	Up to 1650's	1650-1950's	Beginning in the 1950
Epistemology	Religion and Revelation	Reason, Empiricism Science	Epistemological Pluralism Epistemological Holism

*Premodernism: Truth Revealed*

*Construction.* The premodern period dates from the beginning of recorded thought until the mid 1600s. During this time, truth was revealed by God or the gods (hereafter simply "God"); more specifically, special revelation from God. Though how people discerned this special revelation is a contested topic that extends beyond the purposes of this paper, one can generally note that this included sacred texts, visions and dreams, and prophecies during the infancy of premodern thought. This epistemological approach gave the church and religious leadership the privileged position in relation to power and influence.

Later developments in the premodern period focused on authoritative texts or books written by authoritative sources. For example, much of the work of Augustine and other church fathers were viewed as important sources of knowledge or authority. The basis of this power was frequently based on the perceived connection between the author and special knowledge which they have acquired.

*Critique and refinement.* This position of the religious leadership eventually evolved into the church's codification of revelation. The ultimate source of Truth was still God, but most people could only access this Truth through religious leaders. The role of religious leaders was not to discover, control, or construct Truth, but to interpret it for others. Thus, religious leaders worked within the epistemological paradigm to refine the broader understanding of Truth.

*Decline.* The debasing of revelation as the dominant epistemology occurred neither quickly nor easily. The emergence of philosophy, solidified through the Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle marked the beginning of this transition. While religion

remained dominant, as could be evidenced in the execution of Socrates for “rebel rousing” the youth of his day, the emergent philosophy signified the first movement which provided a formidable challenge to the premodern paradigm. The dominance of religion as the source of truth waned further with the schism of Roman Catholicism and the Eastern Orthodox Church, and then with the ultimate failure of the crusades. The work of Aquinas, who attempted to integrate reason and religion, was also significant at this time. This progress, however, later regressed to a more superstitious and mystical approach to epistemology during the Dark Ages.

*Modernism: Truth Discovered and Controlled*

*Deconstruction.* The transition from the premodern to the modern was difficult. In order to accomplish the paradigm shift, major modernist thinkers had to first deconstruct premodern thought. As these thinkers called into question premodern assumptions and demonstrated their insufficiency, modern epistemologies moved toward the privileged epistemological position.

The primacy of premodern, revealed truth received a major blow in the 1500s with the Protestant Reformation as reformers challenged the authority of the church. At the same time, scientists such as Copernicus and Galileo promoted scientific theories that countered long-accepted revealed truth. Divided and proven wrong in several instances, the church was unable to defend its claim as the source of Truth. In this context, two new epistemological approaches emerged: reason and empiricism (or positivism). As reason, logic, and science became more influential ways of knowing, universities and politicians become more powerful. The church remained

influential, but less powerful. The further the West moved into the modern period, the more significant this shift in power became.

We should note here that many scholars today consider positivism to be synonymous with “science.” However, in the early modern period positivism and empiricism referred to an approach to knowing based on the senses and experience. Positivism, emerging largely from Hume’s philosophy, as understood at the time was a form of extreme empiricism that stated that all knowledge is ultimately gained through experience. Confusion around these terms continues today, as many scholars continue to use “empiricism” interchangeably with “science.”

*Construction.* A key process in the establishment of the modern period was the construction or development of methodology. This replaced the role of systematic theology and the sacred texts of the premodern period. As modern methodology developed and became increasingly trusted, the new trends of positivism, logical positivism, and the scientific method emerged. One might say that methodology, including scientific methodology, became the religious texts or theology of modernism. Their validity was largely unquestioned by the pietistic modernists. Major thinkers who aligned with positivism and logical positivism, the two most extreme approaches modern epistemology, held high regard for the modernist methodologies and strictly questioned any competing approaches to truth.

*Critique and refinement.* During the later development of modern thought, thinkers such as Locke, Kant, and Mill critiqued and refined the core assumptions of modernism. From this basis, they applied modern tenets to governance, philosophy, and ethics.

Likewise, modern tenets reigned supreme in the realm of theology. Though they made use of a different vocabulary, theologians developed hypotheses (e.g. sola scriptura, the quadrilateral, limited atonement) and tested them on the basis of logic and methodological analysis of ancient texts. The study of apologetics, or *a rational defense of faith*, is another excellent example. In the premodern period, there was no need to defend faith rationally. At that time, the focus was more on ascertaining the essentials of faith (creeds), while during the modern period, emphasis shifted to the development of systematic theologies.<sup>2</sup> It is interesting to note that several of these systematic theologies, even that developed as late as Pieper's (1950-1953), specifically demanded unquestioned acceptance of that which is unknown or cannot be proven. Approaches such as these reflect continued defensiveness against modernism in favor of the absolute power of the church as the sole source of Truth.

Additional critiques and refinements are reflected in places such as the intelligent design argument, which emerged from the William Paley and others (Grace & Moreland, 2002).<sup>3</sup> These new theological movements either attempted to integrate science or to use science to reformulate aspects of theology. Regardless of approach, science and empiricism now had a voice in theology.

*Decline.* As its dominance peaked at the turn of the twentieth century, modernism began to show its first signs of vulnerability. Scientific theories of

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<sup>2</sup> This is not to say that there were not systematic theologies emerging during the premodern period. We are aware that many systematic theologies began to develop in this period, particularly the later portions of the premodern period. However, more attention was on the focusing down on the essentials. Similarly, many movements in the modern period focused on determining the essentials, but the more dominant trend was on developing elaborate theological systems.

<sup>3</sup> One should note that there are several approaches to the intelligent design argument. Some are explicitly Christian, other are not. Within the Christian movement, some attempt to integrate the intelligent design movement with an evolutionary perspective. Others will use similar arguments for intelligent design to argue against evolutionary theory.

relativity and quantum mechanics began to suggest limits to what science can know or determine to be true. Failures of inventions (e.g. Alfred Nobel's dynamite) and philosophies (e.g. World War I and the League of Nations) to end war and promote peace left many disgruntled with the tenets of modernism. In this context, numerous thinkers proposed alternatives to modernism, many of which have been identified as postmodern. However, as it was necessary to first deconstruct premodern philosophy in order to move into the modern period, so it also is necessary to first deconstruct modernism to move into the postmodern period. For many, this deconstruction phase has been mistaken as postmodernism proper. However, this does not take into account the broader history of intellectual thought.

As the early postmodern deconstruction has gained greater acceptance, a shift in focus to another epistemological construction has begun. The development of a postmodern epistemology is still early in its development. For the purpose of this paper, we will use the term *epistemological pluralism* to refer to the emerging postmodern way of knowing. However, a notable alternative should be mentioned. Murphy (1996), a prominent Christian theologian and philosopher, utilized the term *epistemological holism*. Though pluralism and holism certainly carry different connotations, we believe the core of the two terms are essentially similar. Postmodern approaches to epistemology emphasize the need for multiple epistemologies and question over-reliance on any one epistemology.

#### *Summary—Paradigm Phases*

A brief history of premodern and modern thought suggests that major epistemological paradigms have experienced three phases in their development. The

first phase is *deconstruction*. While it is not clear whether premodernism had to go through a deconstruction phase, modernism and postmodernism clearly have gone through this process. As has been discussed, the prior epistemological paradigm needed to be deconstructed before the emergence of a new epistemology could replace the old. Second is a *constructive* phase in which the new paradigm builds or constructs new epistemologies, methodologies, and meaning systems. Finally, there is a critical phase in which the newly constructed methodologies are *critiqued* from the perspective of the paradigm.<sup>4</sup> The purpose of this critique is not to tear it down in preparation for a new paradigm. Rather, the intentions are to critique the methodology in hopes of recognizing limitations and strengthening the paradigm.

#### *Postmodernism: Truth Created*

Postmodernism is difficult to define because it is still a relatively new paradigm in the process of defining itself. As this paper purports, the early phase of postmodernism entailed the deconstruction of modernist philosophy. As postmodernism has become more established, the focus has shifted toward developing a new approach to epistemology, what we call a pluralistic approach. Not surprisingly, the deconstruction phase was marked by extreme reactions to the dominant themes of modernism.

During its deconstruction phase, modernism reacted to premodernism with a rigid commitment to empirical positivism based on human experience. This form of positivism served as the dominant epistemology of the deconstruction phase of the modern era. With time, modernist thinkers critiqued this early epistemology and drew

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<sup>4</sup> This could be contrasted with the deconstructive phase in which the paradigm is critiqued from outside, or from the emerging new paradigm.

more heavily upon probability theory. Postpositivism, the epistemological foundation of the construction and critique phases of the modern era, drew heavily upon probability theory. Late modernist thinkers believed in absolute truth, but were skeptical of human claims to define such truths unconditionally. Instead, they utilized probability theory to test models that seemed to approach the truth. For example, scientists have not absolutely established the existence of the atom in positivistic terms. However, in terms of postpositivism, the theory of the atom is a strong model; it is highly probable that this theory closely approaches the truth.

Postmodernism, during its deconstruction phase, also reacted to the major claims of the modern era. The characteristic epistemology of this phase was constructivism, a belief that all truth is constructed, or created. In its oft cited, reactionary form, constructivism denies the existence of any ultimate or absolute form of truth. Further, many early postmodern writers insisted upon drawing no distinctions between relativism and constructivism. As we will discuss in this section, emerging postmodern epistemologies reflect a less rigid commitment to constructivism or relativism, an epistemology that might be termed "postconstructivism." For the purpose clarity in this paper, we instead use the term "epistemological pluralism."

While epistemology focuses on *how we know what we know*, an important underlying question pertains to the nature of truth. Premodernism and modernism function with the assumption that people are able to attain ultimate truth (or capital "T" truth). In the premodern era, God revealed Truth to people; in the modern era, humans aimed to discover and control Truth through reason and science. However,

postmodernism takes a different stand on the nature of truth. What is consistent among postmodern philosophers, theologians, and psychologists is the belief that humans are unable to attain ultimate truth. What is not agreed upon is whether ultimate truth exists.

Martin and Sugarman (1999), two of the foremost psychologists who have examined this issue, have proposed a “levels of reality” approach, which essentially discusses a continuum from realism to anti-realism. At one end of the continuum are the anti-realists, who believe that ultimate truth does not exist. This group has received the most attention (and criticism) from theologians and religious psychologists who maintain that ultimate truth is a necessary component of faith: to deny the existence of ultimate truth is to deny the existence of God. However, this type of statement is illustrative of several misunderstandings about postmodernism, as we will discuss.

At the other end of the continuum are the realists. The realist group within postmodernism believes that there is ultimate truth, but are skeptical of human ability to attain this truth. For realists, truth is something that humans are ever seeking, but never reaching. Through time, it is possible to better sharpen the ability to approximate truth, but not to fully attain ultimate truth.<sup>5</sup>

An implicit assumption in the “levels of reality” approach is that there are different types of truth. One means of presenting this utilizes Augustine’s two

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<sup>5</sup> It could be noted here that there are Christians who ascribe to the anti-realist postmodern position, too. The anti-realists Christians are primarily process theologians who assert that God is fluid. In this position, the essence of God (i.e., God’s goodness, grace, compassion, etc.) remain constant, but God’s specifics change, particularly through being in relationship with God’s creation. Because God is changing in this position, it is maintained that Truth is also fluid, and thus elusive. A more detailed discussion of the anti-realist Christian perspective is beyond the scope of the current paper.

kingdoms. In the earthly kingdom, truth is not absolute, but relative. The Bible testifies to this fact in its treatment of polygamy, slavery, and women, for example. Truth in the heavenly kingdom is absolute and ultimate; it is also so great in its magnitude that it surpasses human comprehension. C.S. Lewis (1970) stated,

The miracles in fact are a retelling in small letters of the very same story which is written across the whole world in letters too large for some of us to see. Of that larger script part is already visible, part is still unsolved. (p. 29)

According to Lewis, from God's perspective the Truth of miracles is but a small Truth. However, from a human perspective, the Truth of miracles is a grand truth as it surpasses human understanding or explanation. If miracles, which are beyond human understanding, are small in God's eyes, then certainly it is naïve at best, and much more likely arrogant for humans to discuss ultimate truth with any degree of certainty.

A related, though distinct, means of developing this distinction can be drawn between truth in the realm of the finite and truth in the realm of the infinite (Hoffman, 2005a; Tillich, 1957). Truth in the realm of the finite is the form of truth people can access to as humans. Because humans are finite, their understanding of truth is finite and incomplete. The same truth in the realm of the infinite is complete. This realm of truth is equivalent to God's truth. Tillich (1957), using this same emphasis on the lack of completeness in the human understanding of truth, took this discussion one step further. For Tillich, if humans claim to have hold of ultimate truth, they claim to have truth in the realm of the infinite. In other words, to claim

fully know truth is to claim to be God. This argument forms the basis for Tillich position that doubt and humility is a necessary aspect of faith.

Though not dependent on any of these specific understandings, a religious approach to postmodernism would maintain that ultimate truth is religious truth, or God's truth. However, there are also relative truths, which include personal truth, social truth, and even biological/physical truth (Martin & Sugarman, 1999). To elaborate, one might compare social truths to Kuhn's (1970) idea of a paradigm. Each culture develops different paradigms (social truths) that are influential upon how people within that culture understand truth, how they interpret events in their lives, and even how they experience different events. Likewise, one can compare personal truths with personal experience and belief systems, comparable to what are discussed as schemata in cognitive psychology or the unconscious in depth psychology. Biological or physical truths refer to the types of truth ascertained from the hard sciences. To state it bluntly, truth is very complex within postmodernism.

*Illustrative Example: Psychoanalysis*

One of the clearest examples of the influence of philosophical trends upon the field of psychology can be illustrated through an examination of trends in psychoanalysis. Stephen Mitchell (1988), in his contemporary classic, *Relational Concepts in Psychoanalysis: An Integration*, classified historical trends in psychoanalysis and began to track the emergence of a new tradition. Stark (1999) further advanced Mitchell's comparative analysis utilizing more straightforward language. For the purpose of simplicity, this paper will rely upon Stark's typology.

Stark (1999) placed the history of psychoanalysis and psychodynamic therapy into three periods or traditions, which she referred to as Model 1, Model 2, and Model 3. Model 1 refers to classical psychoanalysis originating with Freud's work. Freud's psychoanalysis is a drive reduction model that utilized insight or the provision of knowledge as the primary therapeutic tool. In this conception, the therapist is the expert or the person with the inside track on the truth. Consistent with Freud's desire for psychoanalysis to be seen as a science, classical psychoanalysis plants itself firmly within the modernist paradigm from which it emerged.

Beginning with the neo-Freudians, self psychologists, and object relations theorists, a new model emerged that was much more relationally focused. These traditions, collectively referred to as Model 2, placed emphasis on a structural deficit that emerged either from the "presence of bad" or the "absence of good" somewhere in childhood (Stark, 1999, p. xvii). Model 2 places more emphasis on the client as the expert. The therapist still applies the hierarchical structure and approach of modernism, but she or he acknowledges the limitations of the therapist as knower. However, because of the continued tendency to assume that there is truth to know and analyze for its hierarchical structure, this model retains a modernist philosophical base. As was pointed out by Sorenson (2004b), this is quite evident in many analytic training institutes. These therapeutic approaches emerged primarily in the deconstructive phase of postmodernism, which reflects some of the postmodern themes emerging in the Model 2 approaches, particularly later object relations theorists. Yet, they retain what we consider to be a *critical* modernist approach.

The Model 3, or contemporary psychoanalytic approaches<sup>6</sup>, emerged in the 1980s. Mitchell's (1988) aforementioned book serves as the catalyst for the development of this model. This tradition is well within the postmodern period, emerging after some movement from deconstructive phase to the constructive phase of postmodern epistemology. Model 3 therapies espouse an intersubjective epistemology in which the truth emerges between therapist and client (Stark, 1999). Stark positions herself even more firmly within the anti-realist position in postmodernism, at least as it pertains to the client-therapist relationship:

There is no inside track on the truth-because there is no truth. But even if there were an inside track, however, the therapist would not have the exclusive rights to it, because the Model 3 therapist is thought to be always a participant in the therapeutic process, never simply an observer. (p. 220)

However, one should note that this quote refers more to the social or interpersonal level of reality and does not necessarily make any claim pertaining to ultimate truth on the transcendent, religious, or spiritual level. Nonetheless, contemporary psychoanalysis is the first clearly postmodern tradition within the psychoanalytic therapies.

In summary, Model 1 therapy emerged from the modern period and reflects a strong modernist epistemology. Model 2 therapy emerged during the transition from the modern to the postmodern paradigm. It reflects primarily a modernist or critical modernist epistemology, but does also reflect traces of embryonic postmodern

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<sup>6</sup> Contemporary Psychoanalysis commonly referred to as Relational Psychotherapy (see Mitchell, 1988). Included in the Model 3 tradition is also Intersubjectivity (Stolorow & Atwood, 1992; Stolorow, Brandchaft, & Atwood, 1987) and Constructivist Psychoanalysis (Hoffman, 1998).

thought. The Model 3 tradition emerged after the paradigm shift to postmodernism and reflects a strong postmodern epistemology.

#### Modernist Monsters, Postmodern Ghosts, and Premodern Superstition

Each of the three broad paradigms discussed has strengths and challenges. Also, each is open to misinterpretation, sometimes drastic, from people firmly planted within a different paradigm. In this section, we examine some of the challenges inherent with each paradigm. In doing so, we will rely and expand upon the descriptive language of Pulleyking (2005) as adapted from the words of Einstein.

#### *Modernist Monsters*

Joey Pulleyking (2005), in discussing the dangers of the modernist extreme, addresses the dangers of applying scientific methods without an awareness of their limitations:

Monsters are created when the ideals and methods of scientific knowledge are applied without a corresponding sense of ultimate value and reality...Scientific monsters frequently carry out their destruction on the individual level in the form of arrogance, narcissism, and intolerance of different theories or methodologies. (p. 16)

In other words, science, when not balanced by religion and other variant epistemologies, becomes a monster.

*The treatment movement.* One can identify several scientific monsters in contemporary psychology. One important example is the empirically supported (or validated) treatment movement. While recent times have witnessed improvements in the form of increasing flexibility, this movement still over-emphasizes the importance

of scientific epistemology, primarily through a bias toward quantitative research. As Pulleyking (2005) stated, "Scientific monsters have also been academically described and critiqued with the terms of reductionism and naive realism" (p. 17), yet psychologists, therapists, and counselors still rely unquestioningly to claims of empirical support as validation or proof. It is not that attempting to empirically examine and critique psychotherapy in itself is problematic, but rather the privileging of empirical support while negating other forms of evaluation (Hoffman, 2005b).

Tan (2001, 2002, 2003) discussed many of the problems with the movement toward empirical support being the primary determinant of treatment choice and success. In particular, Tan asserted that there are aspects of the human condition, such as spirituality, which tend to evade adequate empirical investigation. Additionally, he advocated for the need for multiple methods of investigation that have historically not been included in this process. Though not Tan's intention, his advocacy of a variety of assessment methods is consistent with the postmodern assertion of the need for epistemological pluralism.

While most clinicians would assert that empirical investigation of the therapy process is beneficial, when these investigations are not balanced by other viewpoints, they become empirical monsters. In this light, we recommend a balanced viewpoint in which research is one of many voices in the effort to assess the benefits of therapy.

### *Postmodern Ghosts*

In contrast to modernist monsters, postmodernism creates a different set of concerns, or ghosts. The first of these is the reactionary constructivist epistemology that blurs or disregards distinctions between relativism and constructivism. It is

important here to note that *postmodernism is not relativism*. In fact, most postmodernists find relativism just as distasteful as the modernist or the religious individual. Rather, postmodernism holds all truths in tension. This tension is an essential characteristic a pluralistic epistemology. As we will discuss later in this paper, epistemological pluralism further insists on the continual investigation and reassessment of truth claims through multiple epistemologies. Again, relativism is not postmodernism; it is a ghost that reflects reactionary claims of early postmodern writers.

Knowledge claims or methods that lack context are a second postmodern ghost. Murphy (1996) asserted that modernist knowledge is built from a foundationalist approach, while postmodern epistemologies better fit with a web model or metaphor. The foundationalist approach is illustrated by Descartes' modernist approach. For example, Descartes' argument for existence was "I think therefore I am." In this approach, thought is the foundation of existence *and* the foundation of knowledge. Truth is build from this platform. Similarly, Descartes' argument for the existence of God was based on a foundationalist, rationalist approach.

The modern mind finds it difficult to understand how one could build an approach to knowing without a foundation. Quine's metaphor of a web theory effectively illustrates this perspective (see Murphy, 1996). Foundationalism built a theory of knowledge upon a foundation of what it considered to be truth. While this metaphor sounds nice, a problem occurs when there is a crack in the foundation. In order to rebuild the house, one must first tear it down to build a new foundation. As

one discovers more and more cracks in modernism's foundation, it became increasingly difficult to manage a foundational approach.

Conversely, a web is much more adaptable. If a point in the web needs adjustment, it affects the entire web (holism), but it does not require tearing down the entire web to begin again. While one might consider the foundation of a web to be the structures to which the web is attached, a web is also adaptable enough to attach to many different structures or even break away from one structure in order to attach to another. A problem occurs if the web loses sight of how it came to be or what surrounds the web.

The third ghost of postmodernism is whimsical change. Because many people often mistakenly associate postmodernism with relativism, they assume that grand changes can occur rather flippantly. While this once again reflects a misunderstanding of postmodernism rooted in its deconstruction phase, it is also a potential problem. To continue with the web metaphor, significant changes resulting in large holes can easily destabilize the web. However, if one gradually adjusts the web rather than making large changes all at once, it is able to remain stable through this change process. Stated differently, postmodernism also stands against whimsical change. Rather, change entails a critical process in which the change is critique for its fit in the larger web and from the perspective of multiple epistemologies.

An interesting parallel to the therapy process is worthy of note here. The therapeutic process is similar to making gradual adjustments to a web. As clients examine their lives, they discover insights and make adjustments. At the end of the therapy, their web is quite different than the initial web filled with confusion, holes,

and instability. If therapists encourage people to make adjustments too quickly, thus creating large of holes in the web, they provide a disservice to the client by threatening their stability. Conversely, if therapists can help clients gradually make adjustments they will be more successful in adding clients to build a strong, healthier, and more stable web.

### *Premodernist Religious Superstition*

Garrit tenZythoff paraphrased Einstein stating, "Religion without science becomes superstition; science without religion becomes a monster" (as cited by Pulleyking, 2005, p. 15). In other words, epistemology moved from superstition (religion) to monsters (science) over the course of history in its epistemological foundation. Though this position more closely reflects premodern thought, we chose to discuss it here after critiquing modern and postmodern thought. Though long removed from epistemological dominance, premodern epistemologies remain active among many extremist and fundamentalist religious positions.

Armstrong (1993) cited the 1970s as a period when fundamentalism began to reemerge in a new, powerful form in American. The attacks of September 11, 2001 reflected the dangers of certain forms of fundamentalism outside the United States while spurring the fundamentalist movement in the United States. The danger of fundamentalism is not its commitment to or conservative view of faith, rather its lack of balance in the broader context of epistemological knowing. As Armstrong stated, "In all its forms, fundamentalism is a fiercely reductive faith" (p. 391).

Within the religious integration movement (broadly defined), one sees religious superstition in some forms of Biblical counseling, such as the viewpoints purported by

Jay Adams and his followers, or the anti-psychology movement of the Bobgans (for a brief overview, see Beck, 2003). While premodern religious superstition may not be prevalent within the majority of the religious integration movement, any time religion *uncritically* trumps other epistemological it has re-emerged.

### *Summary*

A healthy postmodern epistemology must navigate carefully to avoid falling into the traps of premodernist religious superstition, modernist monsters, and postmodern ghosts. We maintain that this can be best achieved from a critical postmodern approach that utilizes an epistemological pluralism. A pluralistic approach to epistemology values different approaches to knowing while remaining skeptical about any over-reliance on any singular approach.

### Implications for Theory and Integration

#### *Epistemology as a Barrier to Integration*

One of the historic problems in integration is the lack of mutual depth in what is integrated (Hall & Porter, 2004; Pulleyking, 2004). Beck (2003) critiqued the integration movement as being out of balance, focusing too much on either psychology or religion rather than seeking depth in each domain. As we have already discussed, the modern period brought about a situation in which integration appeared to be a necessity for religion to survive and remain relevant in a world of science and logic. However, this approach neglected the epistemological element of integration on both sides. It is not possible to seek the integration of psychology and religion (faith, theology) without first addressing the epistemological issues.

Ian Barbour (1990, 2000) is one of the scholars who effectively addressed the problem of religious integration. He proposed that all attempts to describe the relationship between religion and science, including psychology, fall into one of four categorizations: (1) Conflict, (2) Independence, (3) Dialogue, and (4) Integration. In the conflict category, the epistemological barriers are too great to be resolved. Either science or religion is correct, but it cannot be both. The independent position states that these are two different disciplines dealing with different aspects of the human experience; they are unrelated. From the perspective of the dialogue position, science can learn from religion and religion can learn from science. There may be some overlap and some related content domains, but they are still distinct: some religious questions will point toward science while some scientific questions (i.e., limit questions) point toward religion. Depending upon the question, one or the other discipline contains the right answer.

Integration is the final perspective. From an integrationist perspective, one assumes that religion and science are studying the same thing and both epistemologies are valid. The challenge that remains is how these two different disciplines relate.<sup>7</sup>

From a modernist perspective, epistemology is a difficult issue to get around. If knowledge is built from a foundation (i.e., foundationalism), and this is the way Truth is known, then a clear epistemology is needed. It is difficult, from the modernist

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<sup>7</sup> An important note should be made here in reference to how the term integration is used. Through time, many Christian approaches to psychology and religion have utilized the word “integration” to refer to their unique perspectives on Christian approaches to psychology. As discussed in an earlier footnote, we are using the term “religious integration” to refer to this movement. Barbour’s usage of this term is more precise than the generalized usage of the Christian schools of psychology. In Barbour’s typology many of the viewpoints historically viewed as integration perspectives would better fit with the independence or dialogue position.

mindset, to have a foundation that includes religion *and* science since one or the other epistemology is correct or, at a minimum, is more correct than the other. The postmodernist position allows for an alternative to this modernist quandary.

Many religious integrationists have avoided the topic of epistemology, or functioned with an implicit assumption of a superiority of religious epistemologies. However, this assumption is still vague and ambiguous from both modern and postmodern vantage points. In other words making a blanket statement for the superiority of religious ways of knowing, even when well articulated as being preferential to other forms of knowing, states little. Few integrationists are willing to step into the messy ground of a complex understanding of epistemology. There are some notable exceptions, such as the work of Hathaway (2004), but these approaches are few and far between.

### *Epistemology as a Place for Integration*

While modernist epistemology, particularly foundationalism, creates barriers to integration, a postmodern perspective opens many doors for integration at a deeper level of sophistication. Because pluralism privileges no single epistemology, one can consider many voices. This places religious, spiritual, scientific, and psychological approaches to epistemology on a level playing field.

Many religious people may worry that considering science to be just as viable an epistemology as religion borders on idolatry. While we acknowledge this as a danger, we suggest viewing multiple epistemologies as a check and balance system. By considering multiple approaches to knowing as valid, though each with its clear

limitations, the expanse of different epistemologies are able to prevent people from straying too far without critical feedback.

Consider early congregational approaches to Biblical interpretations. Thomas and Joseph Campbell presented an approach to Biblical interpretation as a collective endeavor (Boring, 1997). They maintained that the best approach to Biblical interpretation was to interpret the Bible in community. The many different voices add to the collective understanding of the Bible and provide a check and balance system that prevents individuals from straying too far. Originating in early American history, this frontier approach was quite revolutionary from the traditional approaches to Biblical interpretation taught at the time. At this time, Biblical interpretation still occurred primarily in a hierarchal structure, in which authority figures were assumed to be in the best position for Biblical interpretation. These authority figures were almost exclusively white males until the mid-1900s. For the Campbells to have promoted a viewpoint of collective interpretation of the Bible in the late 1700s in frontier America was quite remarkable.

This methodology of Biblical interpretation has parallels to the postmodern position being discussed in this paper. The checks come from dialogue, considering multiple voices, and comparing conclusions by multiple epistemologies.

Religious people may also argue that this seems dangerously close to relativism. We suggest, however, that one take a closer look at the dangers of relativism. Relativism states that all epistemologies are equal and stand alone. The position of postmodernism is different and nuanced; it states that many epistemologies are valid (not necessarily equal), but that stand in the context of each

other. In other words, different knowledge systems keep each other in check. One might draw upon the emergence of interdisciplinary studies (a postmodern phenomena) as a model. Manzilla (2005) has argued that “interdisciplinary understanding...is highly ‘disciplined’—that is, deeply informed by disciplinary expertise.... Interdisciplinary understanding differs from naïve common sense precisely in its ability to draw on disciplinary insights” (pp. 16-17). Stated another way, religious integration requires a deep understanding of and commitment to both faith and reason, and never to one at the expense of the other.

### *Summary*

Integration at any depth of sophistication cannot occur without first considering the various epistemologies involved. Modernist assumptions provide difficult barriers to integration largely through its insistence on a foundationalist approach to knowledge. For integration to occur with foundationalist assumptions, either the foundation will be divided against itself or else one must assume that religion/faith and science/psychology examine different domains of a related experience. Both of the approaches result in an unstable system. The majority of approaches to integration have failed to address this issue as they have not addressed the conflicted epistemological issues implicit in their assumptions.

Postmodernism, by moving away from foundationalist assumptions and advocating for an epistemological pluralism, provides a potential resolution to longstanding conflicts in the integration movement. Few theorists have taken advantage of the potential associated with the emergence postmodern philosophies, fearing *postmodern ghosts*. In this context, we challenge the integration movement to

move past its fear of ghosts into a productive dialogue about postmodern approaches to integration.

### Implications for Therapy

#### *Psychotherapy and the Postmodern Condition*

It is difficult to talk about postmodern applications to therapy within the integration movement because, as of yet, there has been little development of sophisticated theory in this realm. One notable exception is a recent issue of the *Journal of Psychology and Theology* devoted to modern and postmodern approaches to integration (Dueck, 2004). However, most of the authors contributing to this issue took a cautious approach to postmodernism at best. Some authors, such as Hall (2004), do a great job at using a postmodern philosophy of science to point out the limitations of science, but resist expanding these implications to our understanding of theology. Our proposal is suggest a bolder inclusion of postmodernism, though we assert it is still important to retain a critical eye. While, as noted, few people within the integration movement have taken this step, there are important exceptions including Dueck and Parsons (2004), Olthuis (2001), and Sorenson (2004).

O'Hara and Anderson (1995) noted, most of the field of psychology remains stuck in the modernist paradigm stubbornly resisting the postmodern revolution. Those accepting the postmodern challenge are still struggling to determine what this means for the field of psychotherapy. Jencks (1995) described the situation as follows:

The challenge for a Post-Modern [therapist]...is to choose and combine traditions selectively, to eclectic (as the verb of eclecticism would have it) those

aspects from the past and present which appear most relevant for the job at hand. The resultant creation, if successful, will be a striking synthesis of traditions; if unsuccessful, a smorgasbord. Between inventive combination and confused parody the Post-Modernist sails, often getting lost and coming to grief, but occasionally realizing the great promise of a plural culture with its many freedoms. (p. 27)

It is easy to see how one could mistakenly interpret postmodern therapy as little more than shallow eclecticism or pragmatism, the psychotherapeutic equivalent of relativism. However, eclectic and pragmatic trends lack the depth and intellectual rigor that postmodernism, at its best, provides. Psychological integrative approaches<sup>8</sup>, such as the existential integrative approach proposed by Schneider and May (1995), are better representations of what postmodern therapy can be. The existential integrative approach critically integrates from other theories while maintaining the centrality of existential approach. The usage of the terminology "critically integrates" indicates that each aspect of other theories that are being integrated must first be compared for consistency and fit with the values and structure (or lack of structure) of the existential approach. That which is contradictory is not integrated regardless of its claimed efficaciousness (pragmatism).

A more central problem is that therapists who do not understand postmodern theory will find a difficult time integrating it into their philosophy or approach. Yet, as Kuhn's (1970) theory suggests, postmodernism impacts culture, including therapy,

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<sup>8</sup> Integrative approaches of this nature should not be confused with the religious integration movement (psychology and theology) discussed previously in this paper. For the purpose of clarity we will use the term psychological integration to refer to this later type of integration. The primary concern here is to integrate different psychological methodologies and theories. It could further be noted that this increasing confusing around the term integration due to its many usages in many ways reflects underlying postmodern trends.

regardless of whether culture is aware of it or comprehends it. O'Hara and Anderson (1995) suggested that individuals struggling with this new postmodern reality is a contributing factor leading to many people beginning therapy. The impact of the deconstructive phase of postmodernism is that Western culture tore down many of its meaning systems and, as Rollo May (1991) stated, has become a culture without myths. For May, myths are not false stories; they are meaning systems that convey deep truths cannot be *proven* to be true. From this perspective, all religions and psychotherapy systems are myths.<sup>9</sup>

If O'Hara and Anderson along with May are correct in purporting that the postmodern condition, or at least early postmodern condition, contributes to what brings clients into therapy, then it is essential for therapists to have some understanding of this situation. May (1991) contended:

As a practicing psychoanalyst I find that contemporary therapy is almost entirely concerned, when all is surveyed, with the problems of the individual's search for myths. The fact that Western society has all but lost its myths was the main reason for the birth and development of psychoanalysis in the first place. ...I speak of the *Cry* for myths because I believe there is an urgency in the need for myth in our day. Many of the problems of our society, including cults and drug addiction, can be traced to the lack of myths which will give us as

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<sup>9</sup> A clarification may be important here. Using Tillich's (1957) framework, seeing Christianity as a myth is not challenging the reality of God, or even of the Biblical story. Rather, it is stating that the infinite (God) cannot be proven in the realm of the finite (humans). Stated differently, religion is about faith (myth) rather knowledge (proven fact). May's statement claiming both religion and psychological theory as myth place them in the same realm allowing for them to be integrated more easily. As stated above, just because all epistemologies are considered to be in the same realm does not make them equal.

individuals the inner security we need in order to live adequately in our day.

(p. 9)

Many psychologists, philosophers, and theologians have mused that most people now seek out therapy for the same reasons they used to seek out religion. When placed in historic context, one should not find this surprising. Existentialism was at its peak in the 1960s and 1970s, the same time that Jencks (1995) labeled as the end of modernism and beginning of postmodernism. In our own timeline (Figure 1), we labeled the beginning of postmodernism near 1947 with the publication of Sartre's (1992) seminal work, *Being and Nothingness*, a work often associated with the beginning of the rise of existentialism in the twentieth century.

Throughout its history, psychotherapy has worked primarily from a deficiency model; therapy attempts to heal harm incurred from what is lacking or from harm imposed (see Stark, 1999). Psychotherapy has not sufficiently addressed the psychopathology related to what clients are *seeking*. Existential therapy and positive psychology are two of the few approaches that have addressed this aspect of the human condition from a therapeutic perspective. At their best, postmodern approaches to therapy must include both a looking back (deficit model) and looking forward (the search for meaning and myth).

This is precisely what therapists are not addressing in the current zeitgeist of brief and solution focused therapy. While these approaches signify an important contribution to the field and have a great utility when properly utilized, they are also representative of the pragmatism associated with a superficial answer to the postmodern question. From a depth psychotherapy framework, these therapies teach

clients to cope with the mythless postmodern condition<sup>10</sup> instead of assisting them in finding authentic answers to difficult postmodern and existential questions.

### *Therapeutic Approach and the Postmodern Condition*

In this section, we will briefly survey some of the postmodern approaches to psychology and their implications for psychotherapy. We acknowledge that some approaches to therapy may be better suited for postmodern inquiry than others. For example, existential and humanistic approaches tend to have a natural fit (Hergenhahn, 2001; Hoffman, 2004a; Schneider & May, 1995). Similarly, many theorists have conceived narrative therapy as being a prototypic postmodern therapy (Jankowski, 2003; Parker, 1999; Swan, 1999). Relational approaches to psychoanalysis also employ more of a postmodern approach (Mitchell, 1988; Stark, 2001). Prior to his recent death, Randy Sorenson (2004b) completed the first book that utilized religious integration to bridge a contemporary relational approach to therapy with a spiritual focus. Aron (2004) has also made some initial musing about how a postmodern relational approach to therapy influences psychological processes such as the God image.

*Experiencing God and Self.* Several authors have questioned how modernist assumptions impact human beliefs about God (i.e., God concept) and how one experiences God (i.e., the God image) from a psychological viewpoint (Aron, 2004, Gibson, 2004; Hoffman, 2004b; 2005a; Hoffman et al., 2005). Hill and Hall (2002), thought not framing it as postmodern, discussed how God concepts are also seen too

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<sup>10</sup> The postmodern condition does not necessitate a mythless society, however, as May (1991) states, it has become this. In the context of our brief history of thought, this could be seen as part of the deconstructive stage of postmodernism. With the new emergence of epistemological pluralism, there is now a real possibility of revising old myths or creating new ones.

narrowly and stagnant. In their view, with which we agree, God concepts and God images must be seen as ever-changing and developing psychological constructs.<sup>11</sup> Such an approach requires a more complex and abstract understanding of religious experience. The underlying question here is how postmodern assumptions change the way humans understand religious experience.

Just as the traditional understanding of the God image has begun to be questioned, so has the nature of the self. One of the most drastic postmodern approaches to therapy can be seen in the writings of Gergen (1995) and Zweig (1995) who purport that postmodernism introduces a radical change in how the self is viewed. According to Gergen (1995), the modern view of the self was that it was a rather stable, consistent entity. This led to a focus on consistency and integration. Conversely, some postmodern thinkers, such as Gergen and Zweig, propose that this view of the self is out-dated. Zweig (1995) went as far as to compare this death of the self to Nietzsche's pronouncement that God is dead. The new self is more fluid, adaptable, and plural. According to Gergen (1995), the insistence upon a consistent, stable self is leading to many of the psychological problems of the postmodern era. To resolve this, he proposed embracing the multifaceted, adaptive self; Zweig proposed accepting the death of self.

Schneider (1999) offered a different interpretation of this problem in his book *The Paradoxical Self*. While not utilizing the same language or framework, he also addressed the contradictory nature of self. However, Schneider viewed paradox as a

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<sup>11</sup> Similar proposals have been made in theological realms referring to our understanding of God beyond the psychological realm. These theologians maintain that God is a fluid God who interacts with the world. However, this theological issue, though it would add further complexity to the psychological experience of God, is beyond the scope of this paper.

preferred alternative to fragmentation. The implications for understanding the self remain clear: it is time to rethink how the self is understood.

*Power and Knowing.* Postmodern therapy, as illustrated particularly in many feminist postmodern approaches, brings into question issues of power (Swan, 1999; Wilkinson, 1997). Swan (1999) pointed out that many of the perspectives on power within postmodern and feminist perspectives rely heavily on the works of Foucault and Derrida. Modernist perspectives tend to idealize the objective and empirical aspects of therapy, which tend to place the therapist as the person in power as the knower, while the client is the one being known. The therapist is the helper and the client the helpee. For many feminist writers, this parallels the mistreatment of women across time. Furthermore, as Swan noted, this parallels the experience of many disenfranchised people who enter into the therapy process. Many feminists have criticized or rejected psychotherapy because of this problem. Others suggest that there needs to be a shift which focuses more on the similarities between client and therapist, de-emphasizes power roles while remaining honest about role differences, and seeks to empower all people seeking psychotherapy. Such a revision would necessitate a radical paradigm shift in psychotherapy.

Irving Hoffman (1999), in his influential article "The Patient as Interpreter of the Analyst's Experience," presented one example of what would be entailed in this paradigm shift. This paper became an important contribution to the psychoanalytic paradigm shift to a relational model of psychotherapy. Hoffman argued against perspectives that view the therapist as knower (classical psychoanalysis) or the client as knower (self psychology and object relations theory). Instead, he proposed a social

constructivist view of knowing in the therapy process. Truth is known or created between therapist and client, not in one or the other person. Many intersubjectivists who align with contemporary or relational psychoanalysis have articulated a similar position (see Stolorow & Atwood, 1992; Stolorow, Brandchaft, & Atwood, 1987).

### *Summary and Implications*

In concluding this section, we propose several important areas of focus for ongoing discussion within the realms of postmodern approaches and religious integration. These themes do not encompass all the important issues, but offer a starting point. The most important postmodern contribution to the understanding of therapy is the push toward a relational model. While not all postmodern approaches or conceptualizations of therapy emphasize the relationship, the relational theme is a predominant perspective (Hill & Hall, 2002; Jankowski, 2003; Olthuis, 2001; Sorenson, 2004b; Stark, 1999). The shift to a relational perspective also has important implications for relational therapy. As we have discussed, this will drastically change the way the experience of God is understood from a postmodern relational perspective.

Second, rethinking issues of power is a necessary prerequisite for the shift to relational approaches. While these issues have not received the attention they deserve in this paper, they nonetheless are essential in early formulations of postmodern integration. From the religious perspective, concern about the connection between racism, prejudice, and religion goes back at least as far as Allport (1958). While the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity helped

resolve aspects of this issue, concerns about the hierarchical nature of much of religion and its impact on disenfranchised groups still deserves continued attention.

Third, as suggested by Gergen, Zweig, and Schneider, the current understanding of the self needs to be revisited. While it may not necessitate the radical approach of the death of self proposed by Zweig, it seems pluralism and the increased complexity of culture brought a sufficient challenge to the unified self. Whether psychologists and theologians continue to focus on an integrated self or embrace a pluralistic, multifaceted self, it is important to understand how these cultural shifts will impact the self that is presented in therapy.

Fourth, postmodern deconstruction has brought about a new existential crisis. Old meaning systems have been destroyed, had their foundations sufficiently challenged, and been shown to be inadequate to solve the postmodern condition. As culture and intellectual thought progresses from deconstruction to re-construction, it is important for integrationists to also make this move and contribute their voice to this process. As pointed out by Malony (2005), Richards and Bergin (1997), and many others, now there is a new openness to religious and spiritual issues. This is an ideal time to promote advancement in our understanding of the relationship between religion, spirituality, and psychology. That said, we suggest that a significant portion of society's openness to spirituality reflects shifts to postmodernism; thus, for religious integrationist voices to be heard in this time and place, they must address postmodern dynamics.

## Conclusion

Many religious individuals and psychologists have viewed postmodernism as a threat. For psychologists, all the progress of establishing itself as a modern science is now for naught.<sup>12</sup> Science no longer has the privileged position. However, postmodernism brings with it many new and exciting possibilities. Included in these possibilities is an opportunity to work toward the resolution of many longstanding problems with the integration of psychology and religion. In this article, we have reviewed the place of postmodernism in the history of thought, argued that contemporary culture is currently experiencing a transition from the deconstructivist to the constructivist phase of postmodern epistemology, and proposed several applications of postmodern theory to the integration of psychology and theology. A primary implication of this paper is the need for greater discourse about the how religious integration can be in dialogue with postmodern trends in contemporary culture and intellectual thought.

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<sup>12</sup> This is one explanation for the empirically supported treatment, the empirically validated treatment movement, and the over-reliance upon research which has developed in the field of psychology. In the modern period, science is considered a superior epistemology and thus more prestigious as a discipline. In trying to establish itself as a viable voice to be considered in the academy, it makes sense for psychology to attempt to base itself upon a modernist, empirical foundation. However, as this paper discusses, it also creates many problems.

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<sup>13</sup> A copy of this paper is available at [www.louis-hoffman-virtualclassroom.com](http://www.louis-hoffman-virtualclassroom.com).

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Figure 1. *Selected Timeline of Philosophical Thought*

Premodern	~2000-1600 BC	Patriarchal Israel
	~1000 BC	The Kingdoms of Saul, David, & Solomon
	~500-300 BC	Socrates, Plato, & Aristotle
	~5 BC - 36 AD	Jesus
	313	Edict of Milan - Established Christianity as the Official Religion of the Roman Empire
	354-430	St. Augustine
	1054	Schism between Roman Catholic & Eastern Orthodox Churches
	1095 - 1291	The Crusades
	1124 - 1274	Thomas Aquinas
	1437	Invention of the Gutenberg Press
	1500-1625	The Protestant Reformation
Modern	1473 - 1543	Nicolaus Copernicus - Heliocentric Theory
	1564 - 1642	Galileo Galilei - Inquisition
	1561 - 1626	Francis Bacon - The Scientific Method
	1632 - 1704	John Locke - Government
	1643 - 1727	Isaac Newton - Physics
	1711 - 1776	David Hume - Empiricism
	1724 - 1804	Immanuel Kant - Critical Philosophy
	1806 - 1873	John Stuart Mill - Utilitarian Ethics
	1809 - 1882	Charles Darwin - Evolution
	1856 - 1939	Sigmund Freud - Psychoanalysis
	1879 - 1955	Albert Einstein - Relativity
	1900 - 1910	First Radio Transmissions
	1914 - 1918	World War I
	1920 - 1930	First Television Transmissions
	1925 - 1927	Quantum Mechanics & the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle
1939 - 1945	World War II	
Postmodern	1943	"Being and Nothingness" by Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) Stimulates the Beginning of Existential Philosophy
	1945	Atomic Bombs Dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki
	1951	The First Computer
	1960s	Civil Rights Movement
	1976	Apple Introduces Personal Computers
	1992	Introduction of the World-Wide Web

