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# Truth-Telling is Stranger Than It Used to Be, Part Two

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The postmodern mind is marked by several significant intellectual moves and assumptions. In order to understand the contours of the postmodern mind, we must look at the basic worldview assumptions that frame its structure.

## The Demise of the Text

If the metanarrative is dead, then the great texts behind the metanarratives must also be dead. Postmodernism asserts the fallacy of ascribing meaning to a text, or even to the author. The reader establishes the meaning, and no controls limit the meaning of the reading.

The late Jacques Derrida, a leading literary deconstructionist, described this move in terms of the “death of the author” and the “death of the text.” Meaning—made, not found—is created by the reader in the act of reading. The text must be deconstructed in order to get rid of the author and let the text live as a liberating word.

This new hermeneutical method explains much of the current debate in literature, politics, law, and theology. All texts—whether the Holy Scripture, the United States Constitution, or the works of Mark Twain—are subjected to esoteric criticism and dissection, all in the name of liberation.

Texts, according to the postmodernists, reveal a subtext of oppressive intentions on the part of the author, and so must be deconstructed. This is no matter of mere academic significance. This is the argument behind much contemporary constitutional interpretation made by judges, the presentation of issues in the media, and the fragmentation of modern biblical scholarship. The rise of feminist, liberation, homosexual, and various other interest-group schools of interpretation is central to this postmodern principle.

Therefore, the Bible is subjected to radical re-interpretation, often with little or no regard for the plain meaning of the text or the clear intention of the human author. Texts which are not pleasing to the postmodern mind are rejected as oppressive, patriarchal, heterosexist, homophobic, or deformed by some other political or ideological bias. The authority of the text is denied in the name of liberation, and the most fanciful and ridiculous interpretations are celebrated as “affirming” and thus “authentic.”

Of course, the notion of the “death of the author” takes on an entirely new meaning when applied to Scripture, for we claim that the Bible is not the mere words of men, but the Word of God. Postmodernism’s insistence on the death of the author is inherently atheistic and anti-supernaturalistic. The claim to divine revelation is written off as only one more projection of oppressive power.

### The Dominion of Therapy

When truth is denied, therapy remains. The critical questions shifts from “What is true?” to “What makes me feel good?” This cultural trend has been developing throughout the century, but now reaches epic proportions.

The culture we confront is almost completely under submission to what Philip Reiff called the “triumph of the therapeutic.” In a postmodern world, all issues eventually revolve around the self. Thus, enhanced self-esteem is all that remains as the goal of many educational and theological approaches. Categories such as “sin” are rejected as oppressive and harmful to self-esteem.

Therapeutic approaches are dominant in a postmodern culture made up of individuals uncertain that truth even exists—but assured that our self-esteem must remain intact. Right and wrong are discarded as out-of-date reminders of an oppressive past. In the name of our own “authenticity” we will reject all inconvenient moral standards and replace concern for right and wrong with the assertion of our rights.

Theology is likewise reduced to therapy. Entire theological systems and approaches are constructed with the goal reduced to nothing more than self-esteem for individuals and special groups. These “feel good” theologies dispense with the “negativity” of offensive biblical texts, or with the Bible altogether. Out are categories such as “lostness” and judgment. In their place are vague notions of acceptance without repentance and wholeness without redemption. We may not know (or care) if we are saved or lost, but we certainly do feel better about ourselves.

### The Decline of Authority

Since postmodern culture is committed to a radical vision of liberation, all authorities must be overthrown. Among the dethroned authorities are texts, authors, traditions, metanarratives, the Bible, God, and all powers on heaven and earth. Except, of course, for the authority of the postmodern theorists and cultural figures, who wield their power in the name of oppressed peoples everywhere.

According to the postmodernists, those in authority use their power to remain in power, and to serve their own interests. Their laws, traditions, texts, and “truth” are nothing more than that which is designed to maintain them in power.

So, the authority of governmental leaders is eroded, as is the authority of teachers, community leaders, parents, and ministers. Ultimately, the authority of God is rejected as totalitarian and autocratic. Christians—especially Christian ministers—are seen as representatives of this autocratic deity, and are to be resisted as authorities as well.

Doctrines, traditions, creeds and confessions—all are to be rejected and charged with limiting self-expression and representing oppressive authority. Preachers are tolerated so long as they stick to therapeutic messages of enhanced self-esteem, and resisted whenever they inject divine authority or universal claims to truth in their sermons.

### The Displacement of Morality

Ivan in Fyodor Dostoyevsky’s novel, *The Brothers Karamazov*, was right—if God is dead everything is permissible. The God allowed by postmodernism is not the God of the Bible, but a vague concept of spirituality. There are no tablets of stone, no Ten Commandments . . . no rules.

Morality is, along with other foundations of culture, discarded as oppressive and totalitarian. A pervasive moral relativism marks postmodern culture. This is not to say that postmodernists are reluctant to employ moral language. To the contrary, postmodern culture is filled with moral discourse. But the issues of moral concern are quite arbitrary, and in many cases represent a reversal of biblical morality.

Homosexuality, for example, is openly advocated and accepted. The rise of gay and lesbian studies in universities, the emergence of homosexual political power, and the homoerotic images now common to popular culture mark this dramatic moral reversal. Homosexuality is no longer considered a sin. Homophobia—a concept that combines the therapeutic notion that all moral opposition is evidence of psychological disease with the politically correct idea that opposition to homosexuality, not homosexuality itself is aberrant—is now targeted as sin, and demands for tolerance of “alternative lifestyles” have now turned into demand for public celebration of all lifestyles as morally equal.

Michael Jones has described modernity as “rationalized sexual misbehavior,” and postmodernity is its logical extension. Michel Foucault, who argued that all sexual morality is an abuse of power, called for postmodernism to celebrate the concept of perversity. He lived and died dedicated to this lifestyle, and his prophecy has been fulfilled in this decade. The very idea of perversity has become perverse to the postmodern culture. Everything is permitted.

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