

## THE INADEQUACY OF THE POSTMODERN CONCEPT OF THE NEW MORALITY

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### Abstract

*This paper delves into the intricate moral ideologies of modern and Postmodernism, underscoring the complexity of this recently popularized “new morality” that challenges biblical standards of integrity. The rejection of objective truth and the acceptance of situational ethics are key components of this complex system. The paper also explores the evolution of these ideologies in modern and Postmodernism, discussing their basic tenets and characteristics, and elucidating the factors that led to the adoption of the “new morality.” Unlike Modernism, Postmodernism opposes truth and rationality, favoring the fragmented, constructed, and subjective nature of knowledge. While Postmodernism, through its “new morality,” may present a nuanced and specific account of ethical standards, unlike systematic ethical theories, it also offers a comprehensive and adaptable ethical philosophy, which is increasingly in demand in today’s intricate world. However, the ongoing need for discourse and critical thinking is paramount to fostering conflict resolution in this diverse context. Only the biblical concept of integrity, with its prescriptive and deontological approach to morality, could offer such a robust foundation.*

Key words: Modernism. Postmodernism. Morality. Ethics. Biblical Standard.

### INTRODUCTION

The contrast between the rebellion of Adam and the obedience of Christ remains, and that forms the society we see today. Some academics point to these descriptions as features of postmodern society. Postmodernism, as apparent today, undermines the deontological conventional ethical systems orientated to the factual truth criteria and traditionalist ethos; additionally, it promotes situational ethics and relativism. As a result, the absence of integrity and the conviction that the end justifies the means have become the order of the day. The

problem is that every contemporary sector of society, including such a significant institution as the church, is contaminated with the principles of Postmodernism. In this regard, Isaías Catorce opined that “For two hundred years (200 yrs.), Christianity has been interpreted and understood in Western context using the modern lenses of science, philosophy and communication theory.” This paper focuses on Postmodernism’s effect on morality, specifically through its attempts to establish the new morality.

## **2. Understanding Modernism and Postmodernism**

By their own ideologies, Modernism and Postmodernism are two movements that define some of the significant and vital eras in post-renaissance Western intellectual thought, culture, and society. While both have different theories and beliefs, they would argue that they help shape how one can understand everyday existence, reality, and truth. However, to evaluate the significance of these two categories, one has to get acquainted with their origins, general features, and philosophical framework.

### **2.1 Understanding Modernism**

The basic principles of Modernism, as the art movement, emerged during the second half of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, a time of rapid industrial growth, technological progress, and profound social transformations. Modernism, a transformative movement, was born from the Enlightenment era of the 18th century, which celebrated reason, science, and the concept of progress. The Enlightenment challenged traditional authorities, the church, and monarchical power, presenting a new worldview where decisions were made not on the basis of tradition and faith, but through reason and experience. This transformative impact of Modernism is what makes it a significant and relevant topic to study.

### ***2.1.1. The Birth of Modernism***

By the first half of the 1700s, discoveries by scientists such as Galileo and Isaac Newton boosted scientific awareness of the world. Such accomplishments convinced people to abandon the medieval, anthropocentric approach to nature, which placed human centrality in the universe, often with a religious direction. Instead, it offered a philosophical outlook on life consistent with scientific positivism, an obsession with data and research.

The word modernity comes from the Latin word “modo,” which means ‘just now,’ which gives cognizance to the present and the contemporary. First used in the fifth century by church authorities to separate present Christian European civilization from the Roman pagan past, the term appeared during periods of significant social change in European history. In current society, the term ‘modern’ means change without reference to tradition as well as the discovery of new things or ways of doing things.

### ***2.1. 2 Characteristics of Modernism***

Modernism is accomplished by creating a model of social life and moral practice based on reason and the claims of reason and instrumental rationality. It brings out the need to segment life into public and private areas and the encounter of competing modes of truth. Modernism presupposes the possibility that there is a rational, systematic way to read and control the world, with the self-contained, rational ego as the critical social subject.

According to the modernist perception, people have the same rationality and are not limited by culture, language, and history. not limited by cultural, language, and history difference. In the words of Denis McCallum, “Modernism views humans as purely material machines; we live in a purely physical world. There can be no objective reality in a sense beyond the capability of our senses. People are rational and autonomous beings and can decide on their

course of action. People should be rationalistic optimists who depend only on the data of their senses and reason. Humankind is progressing by using science and reason.”

Modernism's characteristics can be seen first in its faith in progress and the assumption that people can gain more liberty, enlightenment, and happiness by using rationality, science, and education. This worldview enabled society to believe that all problems could be solved using knowledge and reason, thus incessantly improving humanity's condition.

### ***2.1. 3 Critiques of Modernism***

Although Modernism brought many achievements in science, technology, and the organization of society, it also has observable drawbacks. Modernity critics are aware that medical progress, political and economic depoliticization, and the fairness of bureaucracies have positive attributes. However, they also claim that these apparent changes came with the corresponding dissatisfaction.

German sociologist and philosopher Max Weber thought that making society rational made an orderly world predictable, but the world would be bereft of meaning. According to Weber, stress on reason only extended the pathological process of the world's disenchantment, with the ultimate and most transcendent values receding from the sphere of public life. Of course, this disenchantment made people feel that nothing had a sacred purpose in modern society, wrote Weber.

In addition, faith in modernity, which somehow would pave the way to Enlightenment and liberty, as evidenced by the advancement of science and technology, was a drawback. This hope also resulted in historical reason being reduced to an instrumental-cognitive understanding of the world and all other aspects of existence being banished into the irrationality site. With an esteem for rationality and expertise that had much to offer in practical problem solving, it was a

drawback since it needed to engage sufficiently with the fundamental questions of human existence.

The emphasis on science, reason, knowledge, and human ability throughout the modern period has prepared the way for Postmodernism. While Modernism effectively removed God and all matters religious from the picture to remain limited to purely aesthetic and formal concerns, it did not dodge a return of the repressed in terms of ideas and concerns that would directly challenge the tenets of the modernist paradigm.

Unlike Modernism, Postmodernism can be regarded as an approach with definite and large-scale narratives against the background of which people's experiences were studied. It opposes the concept of truth and rationality in favor of knowledge's fragmented, constructed, and subjective nature. Before defining Postmodernism, one has to look into its background, main features, and the aspects in which it differs from Modernism.

## **2.2 Understanding Postmodernism**

Again, Postmodernism as an intellectual movement is famously difficult to define because it is skeptical and pluralistic in principle. Although people do not pinpoint when Postmodernism started, it developed in the mid-twentieth century, after World War II. Some scholars associate Postmodernism with the 1930s, some with the 1970s or the 1980s, and others with the period after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989.

### ***2.2.1 The Emergence of Postmodernism***

Postmodernism, therefore, was a reaction to what people perceived was wrong or lacking with Modernism. As we have already noted, Modernism was defined by such principles as progress, reason, and universal truth, while Postmodernism questions these postulates. The catastrophe of the two World Wars, fascism and communism, rejection of

scientific rationalism, and progressive optimism of the first part of the twentieth century all led to postmodern consciousness.

Postmodernism makes itself known in several ways and infiltrates every sphere of existence, including philosophy and theology, art, and architecture. In the realm of religion, for example, Postmodernism shifts the focus from the question “Is there a God?” to “Which God?” This is an indication of Postmodernism’s tendencies to dismiss absolute truth and adopt multiculturalism and relativism instead.

### ***2.2. 2 Key Characteristics of Postmodernism***

Postmodernism is keen not to accept any meta-narrative or the grand and central narrative that tries to encompass and give an account of many aspects of life. Depending on the modernist epoch, there were different meta-narratives: the Enlightenment, Marxism, and Christianity. Postmodernism, on the other hand, considers these narratives suspicious because it holds the opinion that they are always oppressive and exclusive.

Postmodernity is not defined by complex, coherent overarching narratives or ideologies as is modernity but is, therefore, absolutely a postmodern artifact. It glorifies Postmodernism’s pluralism, the duality of subjectivity, and relativism. In this view, truth is not something out there waiting to be uncovered; instead, it is an ongoing social process. This opinion directly relates to the idea of the postmodernists as Friedrich Nietzsche, one of the most essential figures in the postmodernist movement who claimed that people may be unable to find the objective truth. He argued that the most basic categories of perception and cognition distort in ways most conducive to one’s assumed comfort. Nietzsche wrote: “We have made a world possible in which we can live—With the hypothesis of bodies, straight lines, surfaces, causes, effects, motion, rest, forms things – Without these fictions, no one could live now. Still, that is not to imply that they are something established or substantiated.”

### **2.2.3 Postmodernism and the Breakdown of Enlightenment Foundations**

One of the reasons for Postmodernism was the seemingly collapse of the Enlightenment's empirical and rationalistic frameworks. The Enlightenment's stress on rationality, probabilistic science, and reason was no longer adequate to face multifaceted and paradoxical modernity.

Responding to this upheaval, Postmodernism redefines language, written and spoken communication, to not correspond to the real world. On the contrary, according to the postmodernists, language is a coded set of signs reflecting back to themselves rather than reality. This concept is coined with the concept of deconstruction, a certain philosophical method that aims to make the unstable and uncertain aspects of language visible.

### **2. 3 Deconstruction and the vilification of metanarratives**

Deconstruction, a theory often associated with Jacques Derrida in the postmodern framework, challenges the traditional view of a text having a single, fixed meaning. Instead, it suggests that texts are inherently ambiguous and open to multiple interpretations, each of which is equally valid.

The philosophy of deconstruction also eliminates the Biblical metanarrative, that is, the conviction in the revelation of God as the creator of humankind, the world, and the universe. This refusal of Postmodernism entails that there is an independently existing, fixed, and unified human reality that can be described accurately enough.

D.A. Carson, another critic of Postmodernism, explained that according to the deconstructionist view of language, there is no fixed meaning; thus, one cannot speak of the truth. According to Carson, "language cannot in the nature of the case refer to objective reality." This



view opposes the modernist view, which claims that language has meaning and truth, making the view more relativistic and fragmented of reality.

Douglas Groothuis is another critic of Postmodernism who pointed out that evangelicals must avoid the deconstructionist agenda by making certainty central again. He argues that when postmodernists are looking forward to denouncing metanarratives and reducing truth to mere language games, it is crucial to respond in a cognate position, affirming the existence of objective truth as the foundational paradigm for comprehending the world around them.

## 2.4 Pluralism and the Challenge to Universal Truth

Another crucial aspect is postmodernism's inclusive acceptance of pluralism, in direct opposition to modernism's quest for universal truths. Postmodernism, rejecting the notion of a single truth, argues that it can be dangerous and often suppresses other viewpoints. Postmodernism upholds the belief that multiple truths can be as valid as their contradictions.

### 2.4.1 Pluralism in postmodern perspective

In postmodern world views, pluralism is not about mere acceptance of differences but a whole-hearted endorsement of the same. According to postmodernists, there exist different cultures, ways of thinking, and regimes of truth, all of which are valuable. As a result of postmodernism, people are now free to explore all the different kinds of stories, which have their own ideas to give. For instance, in the domain of ethics, postmodernism disputes the existence of standard moralities. It means that the notions of "right" and "wrong" are relative and depend on cultural and historical context, as well as social justice and personal narrative. This relativism in ethics is what postmodernism believes—that there is no universal morality, but these are viewed differently in different cultures and at different times.



If postmodernism is generally defined as its presence in a variety of fields, then pastiche, irony, and self-references are examples of how postmodernism shows itself in literature and art. Artists such as singers, painters, playwrights, and authors combine a variety of historical styles, genres, and allusions in ways that defy easy classification. These views are echoes of postmodern thought since they address the diversity of cultural representation and meaning.

## 2.5 Modernism and Postmodernism in Dialogue

Contrary to their differences, modernism and postmodernism do share certain similarities. In this way, postmodernism can be viewed as a modernism progression that takes preexisting concepts to their logical conclusion. Therefore, elements of language and the way meaning is assigned in the world are of importance to both groups.

But moving from one paradigm to another—from postmodernism to modernism, for example—cannot be seen as a simple substitution of one for the other. However, the discussion of epistemology, ontology, and axiology has simply viewed one as a reformation of the other; in other words, they are interconnected, and each can offer a wealth of information and criticisms. Modernism emphasizes these principles

## 2.6 The Ongoing Influence of Modernism and Postmodernism

Modernism and postmodernism debates continue to permeate the present discourse and notation. In academia, they impact areas such as philosophy, literature, art, architecture, and social theory movements. Some scholars and practitioners affirm the principles of relativism and pluralism, which are discussed by postmodernism. Others continue to look for the best way to defend the principles of modernism, claiming that there is reason, science, and values that are universal.

As with culture and society in general, political conflicts between the modernist and postmodernist is seen in discussions over matters like, multiculturalism, human rights and obedience to science. On one side, modernist specialize in objective principles and reason in resolving conflicts, while postmodernism stresses the importance of cultural sensitivity and the doubts in reason.

In the arts, this is observable, particularly from the viewpoint of modernism and postmodernism, in terms of constant evolution from form, style, and meaning. Modernists were trying to free art from conventions, and postmodernists hope to extend this liberation to practically every artistic concept. Postmodern art may therefore be defined in terms of parody, pastiche, and with too much playfulness.

### 3. Ethical Implications

#### 3.1 Understanding the New Morality

Postmodernism plays the crucial role for the modern perception of moral questions, changing a normative approach to the considerations of moral dilemmas with references to context. Originally, moral actions were defined by God's ethics, in which the concept of morality was very definite and unambiguous. Nevertheless, in the context of postmodern culture, such standards have become less and less relevant, with the relative nature of moral actions being determined by the type of situation in which they are being carried out.

One of the most well-known proponents of such a change is Joseph Fletcher, who supported the notion of situation ethics. In his opinion, indices of morality such as honesty, integrity, and faithfulness have been replaced by a new morality—love and nothing else. Fletcher identified three alternative approaches to moral decision-making: The legalistic approach, the antinomian approach, and the situational approach. He despised legalism because of its conservatism and the tendentiousness of its ethical codes, which he deemed way too oppressive

and overwhelmingly prescriptive to be of any practical use. Another doctrine attacked by Fletcher is antinomianism, which promotes that morality is self-generated and not regulated by the law. He prescribed situation ethics as the middle position between legalism and antinomianism extremes.

As further support for his position in the case, Fletcher invokes Jean-Paul Sartre, an existentialist, who holds that nothing is predetermined as valuable or that human nature must be realized. Sartre has postulated that man generates his values by himself and is entirely accountable for them. This view accords with the postmodern ethic, where the ethical subject autonomously judges the practice as right or wrong instead of a morality based on objectively determined principles.

The consequentialist approach to morality is evident from the current generation's perception of matters related to, for instance, premarital sex. While premarital sex generally violates the seventh commandment, today, it may be deemed acceptable or even commonplace within the spirit of situation ethics—the so-called 'new morality.' This approach to moral and ethical decision-making does not categorically prohibit something because it is inherently wrong but will permit an action if it is deemed reasonably beneficial and warranted by the circumstances leading up to it.

Fletcher supported his theory through the words of prophet Isaiah, who describes situational moral situations. He hinged his argument on a quotation from Isaiah: "And seven women shall take hold of one man in that day, saying, we will eat our bread and wear our clothes; only let your name call us; take away our reproach," Fletcher states that even the American monogamy should not be worshipped. Moral choices should be arrived at considering the general needs of the situation.

A. T. Robinson, another “new moralist,” argues that geography and context must change in moral judging. In his opinion, to argue that New Testament Christians created their ethical system means that those standards may not fit into the 20th century. He appealed to postmodern ideas concerning moral relativism, according to which truth may differ depending on the given context.

Likewise, another scholar, Alexander Miller, pointed out that the word “values” does not have an equivalent in the Bible: the moral requirements one must meet are situation dependent. Thus, as Miller pointed out, certain obligations—like the obligation not to lie—can be outweighed by the factors of the situation—for instance, if lying is required to save a life. This perspective is in harmony with the postmodernist’s notion that ethical choices should depend on the appropriateness of the given situation without reference to principles. Situational ethics differ from other ethic systems in the following way: In most ethics systems, the focus is placed on what is recognized as a good or right action. In situation ethics, the question is whether the action fits the situation.

Another indicator that would go in the same direction is the famous theologian Karl Rahner’s contention that any reasonable and workable path of action in each circumstance might not be unique. He claimed this is always a historical human choice rather than anything that may be predetermined by Christian teaching. Rahner rejected the idea of objective reality and contends that moral judgments should be made considering the specific circumstances at hand rather than broad generalizations.

This path inevitably leads to how conventional moral precepts fit within the postmodern setting. For instance, the proscription against adultery (“You shall not commit adultery”) can then be seen as offering an infinite range of behavior contingent on the specifics of each situation. Potiphar’s wife was not the same as Joseph in the book of Genesis because he operated morally,

honorably. This is the contrast between traditional morality and the flexible morality of the postmodern society—the new morality.

Reinhold Niebuhr noted that while most moral theories seem to agree that some crimes, such as murder or theft, are generally immoral, there is almost complete disagreement on how these general principles apply in particular circumstances from time and place. However, Niebuhr argues that this minimal standard is a kind of shadow cast by the one law—the Law of Love—which is the ultimate fulfillment of all other laws and does not itself constitute a basis for moral behavior.

However, the “new morality” seems to endorse God’s presence but not his rules of morality. William Temple best expresses this view by pointing out that the universal obligation is tied to conscience, not to determinate ethical discriminations. Temple notes that proper or prohibited involves circumstance, past, context, relations, and everything. This situational approach disputes the biblical view of integrity, the notion of being sound and complete, proposing that it should not change with the situation encountered.

### **3.2 General Areas of Concern**

There can be hardly an element of postmodern thinking in the postmodern society that would not erosively transform the meanings of freedom, tolerance, and feelings. These terms have become the hallmark of the postmodernist philosophers who are busily decanonizing the fixed moral codes of the conventional world. One fundamental goal of Postmodernism is not the absolving of sin but liberation to do as one wishes, irrespective of the cutthroat conventional ethics. The “new morality” prospers in this ambiance, wherein people are free to gratify themselves, irrespective of moral standards.

The entertainment world has the most powerful influence on people's consciousness and can be called the critical distributor of postmodern philosophical insights. By this method, postmodern values like violence, murder, obscenity, adultery, blasphemy, and many kinds of sexual perversion are portrayed without any form of restraint until the audience becomes immune to such immoral behaviors.

Joseph Fletcher, the proponent of the situational ethic, narrated the case of Mrs. Bergmeir to explain the workings of the "new morality." During World War II, Russians captured her and incarcerated her; Mrs. Bergmeir longed to reunite with her husband and children. In Fletcher's estimation, there was only one way she could be assigned a cabin: to feign pregnancy or sickness, so she decided to get the German guard to impregnate her. In Fletcher's view, Mrs. Bergmeir correctly chose "new morality" since this situation warranted her actions.

In the context of this postmodernist philosophy, where the worst is avoided, Fletcher's reason has several ethical implications. Although Postmodernism does not admit objectivity as a criterion, how can the "lesser of the two evils" be measured? This is a typical problem in implementing situational ethics in a world where conventional moral absolutes seem irrelevant.

The cultural critic Niel Postman noted that television consummates a process: it conveys information quickly, with little effort required by the viewer, who is simply a member of a mass. He also pointed out that the materials that supplied visual images did not have a logical sequence, uniformity, or integration, which facilitated the erosion of standard moral ethics and the emergence of what he described as the "new morality."

These developments are particularly threatening to the biblical understanding of integrity, in that one is supposed to be consistent and hold to the highest moral standards irrespective of one's circumstances. Postmodernism and its "new morality" are rather more flexible and situational in their approach to the question of ethics, stating that morality is relative and subject

to evolution. If left unaddressed, the “new morality” is unable to resolve moral conflict to all party’s satisfaction.

#### **4. Biblical concept of integrity as antidote to the “New Morality”**

Ethics refers to the quality of being integrated regarding moral values and conduct. In its etymological sense, integrity is derived from the Latin integer, which means whole or complete. In contrast, in a moral sense, it refers to a principle of right actions and character. Webster defined it as the rigid observance of rules of morality and purity, wholeness, and soundness. Such integrity can be illustrated by historical biblical characters like Job, Joseph, Daniel, and others, who have shown a solid commitment to ethical standards and principles at significant personal cost.

Traditionally, integrity refers to the ability to follow the legal system of ethical standards and norms, which is coupled with the concepts of meaningful and ethical consistency and truthfulness. The term is derived from the Latin word integer, meaning whole or complete. This etymology underscores the concept’s core implication. Integrity is, therefore, the state of having a single and unambiguous moral model that one follows. R. C. Roberts agreed with Webster’s etymology; he contended that one is said to have integrity when he or she is complete and can resist hostile moral forces such as temptation, suffering, peer pressure, and other vices.

Integrity is important in personal relationships and involves consistency of actions, values, methods, measures, principles, and expectations. In postmodern thinking, freedom and cultural variability in relations are most important, while prescriptiveness creates moralistic rules. The postmodern lack of conflict resolution elevates the need for integrity as an antidote to postmodern ideologies and the so-called “new morality.” Pluralism cannot resolve ethical conflicts; only integrity with intense relationship demands can.

#### **5. Conclusion**



This research traced the development of the moral concept in modern and postmodernism. It is multifaceted, fluid, and characterized by constant change and development that opposes many of the critical assumptions of modern ethical systems. In this regard, Postmodernism has eroded the foundations of Modernism by challenging the notions of factual truth, “perceived” reality, and ethically absolute principles. This change has intensified the transformation of morality into a context-dependent phenomenon, the construction of which involves deconstruction, pluralism, and existentialism.

Modernist principles have been changed by postmodern philosophies, resulting in the development of grand ethical theories such as situational ethics and moral relativism. They all center on such elements as context dependency, people’s choices, and the subjectivity of moral judgments. Situation ethics based on love as a commanding ethic offers a flexible approach to ethical dilemmas, and moral relativism acknowledges the difference in the code among civilized nations and peoples. Together, they embody the new morality—the relativistic, permissive morality tinged with deep, intrinsic suspicion of certainty.

However, this new moral territory has its problems. These various concerns appear over issues of ethic uniformity, proclaimed decline of ethical standards, and possible ethical dilemmas. Suppose there are no more objective reasons, even with the highest desire to do good. In that case, a person disappears in a sea of relative ethical assessments, which could lead to ethical conflicts and controversies. which are not only possible to cause ethical conflicts and controversies. Further, owing to the principles of self-determination and individual responsibility inherent in the new morality, opposite moral points of view between different societies appear.

Nonetheless, the new morality affords a reasonable comprehension of postmodern ethical decision-making in the postmodern world. It engulfs people in analytical thinking or contemplation and focuses on reflecting on ethical issues of life. By admitting the vices of the

previous morality and taking the utility of contexts into consideration, the new morality has shown its inadequacy to resolve moral conflicts in a pluralistic context.

Therefore, the new morality embodies the sociocultural shift regarding ethical understanding and can be viewed as postmodern. It may offer a vague and specific account of ethical standards like systematic ethical theories but provides a detailed and elastic ethical philosophy, which is essential in today's complex world. Therefore, there is an ongoing need for discourse and critical thinking to facilitate conflict resolution in this pluralistic context. Only the biblical concept of integrity, with its prescriptive and deontological approach to morality, could arbitration in case of conflict. The biblical teachings that things are right or wrong regardless of the result is the ultimate, convincing antidote to the "new morality". It is an ethical framework that honors individual rights, social order, and equitable justice.

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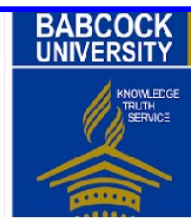
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