

Modern and Postmodern Approaches  
to the Free Will/Determinism Dilemma in Psychology  
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### Abstract

Although modernists in psychology have attempted to cast the free will/determinism dilemma as either settled or irrelevant, it continues to enfeeble theory, therapy, and practice. The primary reason for this continuing enfeeblement is the modern dualistic framework for this dilemma: Either the will (choices, decisions, motives) is dependent on antecedent conditions and thus is determined, or the will is independent of antecedent conditions and thus is free. This framework, however, is not supported by current research and practical experience, indicating that the will is inextricably connected to the past but is not determined by it. A postmodern framework for this issue is outlined that resolves the free will/determinism dilemma (at least on this point) and is consonant with research findings and therapeutic practice. A therapy case is described to flesh out this postmodern resolution and illustrate its practical use.

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The postmodern intellectual movement is supposedly upon us (Bevan, 1991; Dollahite, Slife, & Hawkins, 1997; Lyotard, 1992; Toulmin, 1982). Although modernism is still thought to occupy much of mainstream psychology and psychotherapy (Polkinghorne, 1983, 1990; Slife & Williams, 1995, 1997), postmodernism is hailed increasingly as a "way of knowing" for all psychologists to consider (e.g., Faulconer & Williams, 1990; Gilgun, Daly, & Handel, 1992; Harmon, 1993, 1995; Messer, Sass, & Woolfolk, 1988; Patton, 1990; Richards & Bergin, in press; Slife, in press). Unfortunately, postmodernism contains an extraordinarily diverse group of scholars, so any attempt to capture it is perilous, at best. Still, as others have noted (Bevan, 1991; Faulconer & Williams, 1990; Messer, Sass, & Woolfolk, 1988; Slife & Williams, 1995; Slife, 1997), postmodernism does evidence discernible themes.

One of the hallmarks of this postmodern movement is, as Bevan (1991) puts it, "a return to the great cosmological questions that have fascinated the more imaginative and adventuresome minds in the past" (p. 481). Modernism had assumed that all the relevant questions would be answered through the methods of science. "At the core of modernism," notes Polkinghorne (1990), "was the belief that a method for uncovering the laws of nature had been discovered, and that the use of this method would eventually accumulate enough knowledge to build a 'heavenly kingdom on earth'" (p. 92). In this sense, the modernist assumed that "great cosmological questions" were either irrelevant to this scientific project or answerable through the correct application of scientific method.

Postmodernists, however, have shown that this method is itself "theory-laden"—itself beset with frequently unexamined philosophical assumptions. This has led to the realization that the age-old "cosmological questions" will not be answered through science (Slife & Williams, 1997). Further, postmodernists have demonstrated that these questions have not become irrelevant, as many modernists would have hoped. Problematic issues, such as free

will/determinism, mind/body, atomism/holism, and theory/practice continue to plague the formulation of theories and the devising of therapeutic strategies (cf. Rychlak, 1988; Slife & Williams, 1995, 1997).

Postmodernism has not stopped with the mere exposure (or deconstruction) of these problematic issues. As Bevan notes, postmodernism attempts to "put back together the whole that analytical [modernist] science, over the past 300 years, has rent asunder" (p. 481). In other words, the various conceptual dualisms that have befuddled theoretically oriented psychologists for over a century—e.g., free will/determinism, mind/body, theory/practice—are themselves a product of the modernist penchant for analyzing issues into separate "factors." Such analytic separations have frequently been helpful, to be sure, but they are also problematic, because these separations have to be put back together eventually. How, for example, does the mind and body interact? How do theory and practice relate to each other? How can free will and determinism make meaningful contact with one another? Modernism has "rent asunder" these relationships, to use Bevan's phrase, but modernism has so far failed adequately to put them back together.

Part of the postmodern agenda in psychology is to understand the person in ways that obviate the need for such separations. It is in this postmodern spirit that the present paper attempts to address the issue of free will and determinism. Although modernists tend to cast this issue as either irrelevant or settled, we show how the issue continues to enfeeble theory, science, and practice. The main reason for this enfeeblement is that modernism has rendered the issue as an either/or dichotomy—either a person is free or a person is determined. Unfortunately, research and practice do not support this rendering, and modernist attempts to remove this dichotomy have failed. The postmodern tradition of Martin Heidegger (1926/1962) and Hans-Georg Gadamer (1993) is used here to shift the grounds of the discussion to a conception that does not separate the psychological factors associated with free will and determinism in the first place. A therapy case is then described to illustrate this shifted conceptual ground in practice.

### The Modernist Rendering

The free will/determinism issue is renowned for its pivotal historical role in the formulation of various personality theories, and thus psychotherapies (see Rychlak, 1981). Nevertheless, the development of modernist methods of science has seemed to usurp this role in psychology's more recent past. Because methods were assumed to be the pathway to objective truth, any questions that could not be framed methodologically were viewed as either settled or irrelevant. For example, one prominent modernist approach to "settling" the issue has been to assume that scientific method itself requires determinism (e.g., Heiman, 1995). However, this approach to the free will/determinism issue overlooks the philosophical bias that is inherent in such requirements (Slife, in press). It also overlooks the many methods that do not require deterministic assumptions (e.g., Crabtree & Miller, 1992; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Gilgun, Daly, & Handel, 1992; Patton, 1990; van Zuuren, Wertz, & Mook, 1987).

Another modernist tack is an insistence—via positivism—that theoretical issues such as free will and determinism are no longer, or never were, relevant to psychological science and practice. This, again, is the notion that science will guide us, without the need of theorists and philosophers. The problem is that this scientific guide is itself a philosophical argument about how theories are to be adjudicated (Slife & Williams, 1995, 1997). As such, science itself requires critical examination of not only its philosophical assumptions but also its practical implications. Unfortunately, scientific method cannot examine itself. As Slife and Williams (1997) note, there is a "bootstrap" problem in a method that uses itself to validate its own methods. Indeed, the only means of examining these methods is through philosophical or theoretical analysis.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, any "scientific" assertion of the irrelevancy of certain theoretical or philosophical issues, such as free will and determinism, is itself part of a philosophy. In other words, this type of assertion can correctly be viewed as bias—philosophical fiat in the guise of method.

Moreover, the free will/determinism issue is clearly not irrelevant to practice. Therapists trained in modernist ways of thinking may have learned to dismiss the issue as already answered or basically irrelevant (as above). However, there can be no doubt about its relevance to both client change and therapeutic technique. Regarding change, it is crucial to discern whether clients have the capacity to freely will their way to mental health. This is not to rule out the possibility of deterministic factors. Rather, the issue is the possible presence of a “free will” factor. Few clients, if any, can simply “will” their way to mental health, but a free will could still play a pivotal role in almost any therapeutic change—if indeed a free will exists.

Similarly, the existence of a free will would imply a host of techniques to “facilitate” this will. These techniques would presumably differ from those based upon the determinism of the person. If clients are determined by their biochemistry and/or their environment, then the direct manipulation of these factors would seem the most effective path of therapy. Indeed, in this sense, a variation of the free will/determinism issue underlies the “prescription privilege” controversy. If neurochemistry determines behaviors and emotions, then psychologists would need access to the drugs required to alter this neurochemistry. If, on the other hand, all clients possess a free will, then prescription privileges would be less necessary to treatment. The point is that the free will/determinism issue is neither settled nor irrelevant.

### The Modernist Problem

Although the significance of this free will/determinism problem is clear for a host of different theoretical and therapeutic issues, its solution is not clear. In fact, this lack of clarity is another reason that so many psychologists have abandoned the problem altogether—it appears to be unsolvable. However, similar to many seemingly unsolvable problems, the unsolvability of the free will/determinism issue stems from its framing as a problem. In this case, modernism has framed it as a dichotomy, an either/or incompatibility. Determinism is commonly defined as the assumption that all human actions are caused and thus cannot have happened otherwise than they did (Blanshard, 1979; O'Connor, 1971; Slife & Williams, 1995; Valentine, 1992, p. 15; Van

Inwagen, 1986; Viney, 1993). Because of certain antecedent (causal) conditions, all human thoughts and behaviors must have happened the way they did.

Free will, by contrast, is the assumption that the agent could have acted otherwise, all other factors remaining the same (Howard, 1994; Rychlak, 1992; Slife & Williams, 1995; Valentine, 1992, p. 8; Van Inwagen, 1986; Viney, 1993). That is, all humans can choose to act or think differently than they did, "independent of antecedent conditions" (Viney, 1993, p. 27). These definitions form a prototypical, modernistic dualism—an either/or framework.<sup>2</sup> Either we have an ability to act otherwise and thus a free will, or we do not have this ability and thus are determined. Either we are independent of and thus free of the antecedent conditions that could determine our "will," or we are dependent upon and thus determined by such conditions.<sup>3</sup> As we will demonstrate later, the philosophical framework of modernism leads to this either/or characterization of free will and determinism. Psychologists are therefore relegated—by modernist theoretical definition—to a framework that assumes the two constructs are incompatible (Slife, 1994).

Many psychotherapists may overlook this theoretical incompatibility, viewing their clients' behaviors as reflective of both free choices (e.g., self-generated choices) and deterministic constraints (e.g., reinforcement history). Still, these mixed conceptualizations are formulated in spite of modernist psychological theorizing. By definition, free will and determinism are incompatible assumptions. Current research, however, seems to support the mixed conceptualization of these therapists. For example, factors such as decision-making, self-generated motivation, and self-awareness have demonstrated significance in client care and cure (Binswanger, 1991; Bakan, 1996; Howard, Myers, & Curtin, 1991; Bergin & Garfield, 1994). These factors have long been associated with some variation of free will, because they are difficult to conceptualize as factors that are solely determined by one's environment and/or biochemistry. Similarly, factors such as biological constraints, situational restrictions, and past experiences have also been related to therapy effectiveness (Loewenstein, 1996; Bogen, 1995;

Harcum, 1991). These factors have long been associated with variants of determinism and are difficult to understand as factors that provide a person with the ability to "act otherwise."

There may be some quibbling about which factors are underlain by which assumption. However, the main research conclusion is that factors traditionally associated with both assumptions seem to be important to effective therapy. Moreover, these factors can occur together. That is, these factors do not always work alone or rotate their significance. These factors often work simultaneously, as in self-generated motivations occurring within biological constraints or in decision-making that takes account of past experiences. Such research findings are difficult to understand from a modernist conception of these assumptions, because a person is theoretically allowed to be either free or determined, and never both.

This difficulty is perhaps most striking when considering the importance of both a person's past experiences and a person's choices or decisions. As mentioned, past experiences (e.g., reinforcement history, cognitive storage) are often associated with deterministic assumptions, while choices and decisions are frequently associated with free will assumptions. In this sense, choices and decisions could not be based upon past experiences because they would be determined and thus not be choices (in the sense of being able to choose "otherwise"). However, it is difficult, if not impossible, to conceive of a meaningful choice without it being connected in some way to past experiences. How meaningful would a decision be without the past to guide us? Without the past, a choice could only be an arbitrary or a random choice; it could not be based on information or consequences, because knowledge of these stems from past experience. How would we even know that we had a choice without some sense of the past (Slife, 1994; Williams, 1992)? That is, our choices must be formulated in terms of past events and a language learned in the past.

The modernist dilemma seems clear at this point: On the one hand, modernist theorizing permits only a dualism of free will and determinism—an either/or conception. Either a "will" is independent of the past (and thus is free), or a "will" is dependent upon the past (and thus is

determined). It cannot be both independent and dependent at the same time. On the other hand, this dualistic system is difficult to understand, because people's choices and decisions only make sense in light of their past experiences. Moreover, research findings and even our practical (e.g., therapeutic) experiences appear to strongly indicate the importance of both factors. However, the theoretical incompatibility of these factors—the modernist either/or conception—would indicate that this is not possible.

### The Modernist Solution

This problem has not gone unrecognized in modernist theorizing, though it has rarely been addressed directly. The most prominent modernist approaches to solving the problem are to discuss the past as a "soft determinism" or as an "influence." Although there are several differing forms of soft determinism (cf. Robinson, 1985; Rychlak, 1981; Sauvayre, 1995; Van Inwagen, 1986)<sup>4</sup>, most forms attempt to account for "subjective" factors, such as will, thoughts, and feelings,<sup>5</sup> without violating the doctrine of universal causation (Van Inwagen, 1986).

Universal causation is the notion that all events, including subjective events, cause the events that follow them and are caused by the effects that precede them. This means that soft determinism is what philosophers call a "compatibilism." Subjective factors, such as a person's will, are compatible with cause and effect sequences, and thus the incompatibility of modernist dualism is seemingly overcome. A person's "free will" does indeed cause behaviors and "choices," but this will is itself caused, and thus determined, by factors that precede it, such as past experiences.

Unfortunately, this "solution" rarely satisfies the modernist advocate of free will. If the cause of a person's will or choice stems from events that precede it in time, then the will or choice can no longer be said to be freely willed or freely chosen. To truly have a free will is to be the uncaused cause of one's will. That is, people must be the originative agents of their own actions, and this agency is impossible in a conventional cause-effect understanding of these actions (Rychlak, 1981, 1988).

Many psychologists, at this point, might want to assert that such an originaive, uncaused cause is impossible, but this type of assertion is part of the problem. If universal causation is affirmed—if all events have causes—then determinism reigns and free will is impossible in the conventional modernist sense. In other words, the compatibilism of soft determinism must hold that other factors, such as the environment and biochemistry, ultimately determine subjective factors. As Sauvayre (1995) has noted, "most versions of what is called 'compatibilism' seem to present the conciliatory stance that freedom and determinism are compatible (Dennett, 1984), but they do so by interpreting the claims of freedom in the language of determinism, as a particular form of [soft] determinism" (p. 5). Soft determinism, then, does not take into account both free will and determinism; it merely makes free will factors into determined factors. Choices cannot be choices in the conventional sense of being able to do otherwise, because all choices are themselves the effects of previous causes.

This problem with soft determinism has prompted some modernists to contend that people are free to some degree and determined by their environment and/or neurochemistry to some degree (cf. Slife, 1994). However, this part-free/part-determined approach cannot be a solution, because the extent to which the person's will is free is the extent to which it is independent of the past (and other determined factors). The modernist dilemma is merely recapitulated in the free portion of this approach. Other modernists attempt to effect a "degree" approach to this dilemma by emphasizing the influence of antecedent conditions. Although this emphasis makes sense out of many people's experience of themselves and others—i.e., factors associated with both free will and determinism seem simultaneously important—it begs the question of how this influence occurs. That is, the notion that the past "influences" our choices without determining them is consistent with research and experience, but it does not explain how this influencing is accomplished. Typically, as soon as this influence is specified, a cause-effect framework is involved and determinism is required (Rychlak, 1981; Slife, 1993; Slife & Williams, 1995). As we will attempt to demonstrate, the modernist framework for the free will

and determinism issue disallows any influence of the past except through this causal determinism. Some postmodernists, however, have proposed an alternative framework that allows for the influence of the past without a reduction to causality.

### A Postmodern Rendering

The key to this postmodern framework, as the title of Heidegger's noted book Being and Time indicates, is the assumption of time. This key may be surprising to many psychologists, because psychologists rarely discuss their beliefs about time. Time is viewed as a variable to be investigated rather than as a belief that exists prior to investigation. Still, Slife (1993) has shown that a particular view of time—linear time—is not only endemic to psychology's theorizing but also inherent in psychology's conventional scientific methods. As it happens, one of linear time's many implications for psychology is its either/or framework for free will and determinism. In this sense, linear time is a prime factor in modernism's free will/determinism framework. A postmodern alternative to linear time may help us to overcome this dualism, allowing our theories and therapies to better reflect our research findings and our practical experience.

Linear time is a modernist interpretation of time. To understand what this interpretation is, a definition of time must itself be established. For our purposes, time can be defined as the direction of change (cf. Coveney & Highfield, 1990; Hawking, 1988; Slife, 1993). Human aging is an example of this directionality of change, as the changes in our bodies occur in a predictable order or direction. Likewise, all measures of time (e.g., clocks) are mechanical gauges or representations of this change (Whitrow, 1984). In this sense, linear time is a particular interpretation of this direction of change. However, linear time is rarely understood in modernist psychology as one interpretation of time; it is usually understood as the interpretation of time (i.e., the way time is). This is a false rendering of time from the perspective of postmodernists, because there are at least two other interpretations of our temporal experiences (Slife, 1993, p. 239-264). These interpretations are virtually unknown in psychology, at least in comparison to the linear view. The Enlightenment's historical support of a modernist

interpretation of time is the reason that much of Western culture considers this linear view to be the view (Slife, 1993).

This view includes several properties that are derived from the metaphor of the line.<sup>6</sup> For our purposes, the most important property of this metaphor is the familiar notion that the three dimensions of time—past, present, and future—occur in a sequence of one continuous flow (as a line). The past precedes the present, which, in turn, precedes the future. Although the present is where we exist and live, it is but a durationless instant—a point on the line—separating the past from the future. One relatively overlooked implication of this linear view is its separation of the three dimensions of time. Because each dimension occurs in sequence, each is conceptually and physically separate from the others. Each dimension occurs in its turn along the line of time. For instance, the present cannot exist in the past and the past cannot exist in the present. Present moments are only present for an instant before they pass into the past.

Modernist free will theorists have traditionally assumed that the person's will must take place exclusively in the present. Linear time mandates that it take place exclusively in one of the time dimensions, because each dimension exists on its own, independently of the others. Most theorists would consider it ludicrous to assert that one's choosing and decision-making occurs in the future, and, as we have described, a modernist will is only free if it is free of the past. A major problem with this exclusive focus on the present, as we have outlined, is that many people—including many psychotherapists—have the strong feeling that the past pervades the present. The present makes little sense without the past, whether that past be our cultural history or our personal memory. This is perhaps one of the reasons that psychotherapists have traditionally had difficulty taking a purely free will perspective; it has been difficult to understand a client's will without the client's past as a context for that will (Williams, 1992). Even the notion of "choice" cannot be understood without some sort of historic context in which to understand that a choice is required. How would we recognize who we were or what we were doing without the past in the present?

At this point, a modernist theorist might distinguish between the objective and subjective past. A subjective past, such as our memories, would necessarily take place in the present, but an objective past, such as antecedent experimental conditions, could not take place in the present, by linear definition. Nevertheless, if this objective past is to have any influence or effect in the present—and research findings and therapy experiences suggest that it does—then the objective past would still have to have some way of transferring itself into the present. That is, whether we are discussing the subjective past or the objective past, the question is the same: How does the past influence the present—if it does at all?

Perhaps surprisingly, the linear view of time makes no provisions for integrating the past into the present. Indeed, the linear view specifically forbids any such integration. If the past were in the present, the two dimensions would not be sequential. The past would be simultaneous with the present, and this is considered impossible, by definition. This impossibility, however, has not stopped linear theorists from discussing the influence of the past in the present. How is this influence accomplished with sequential time dimensions? How does a linear theorist bridge the gap between the immediate (or distant) objective past and the present instant? The answer is the linear view of causality. This form of causality was historically conceived by modernist scientists and philosophers for just this bridging function (Slife, 1993; Slife & Williams, 1995). In this sense, the linear view of time is historically responsible for the linear view of causality.<sup>7</sup>

Linear time does to causality what it does to all processes; it distributes causality across itself—along the line of time. Cause and effect are therefore thought to occur in sequence, with cause preceding effect. Past events, then, determine present and future events. This conception, of course, is our Western culture's conventional view of causality, but it is a view brought about by the historic advent of linear time (Bunge, 1959; 1963; Rakover, 1990; Slife, 1993, pp. 230-234). Causality does not itself require this sequentiality. As the noted physicist and philosopher on causation, Mario Bunge, has demonstrated, "the principle of antecedence and the causal

principle are independent of each other" (Bunge, 1959, p. 63; cf. 1963, p. 189; see also Rakover, 1990; Rychlak, 1994; Slife & Williams, 1995). Although a reverse sequence—the effect preceding the cause—is not possible, in principle, there is no violation of the principle of causation for the cause to be simultaneous with the effect (Brand, 1976, p. 89; Bunge, 1959, p. 63; 1963, p. 189; Rakover, 1990, p. 37; Rychlak, 1981, p. 768-773; Slife, 1993, p. 230-234; Slife & Williams, 1995, p. 100-115.).

It is linear time, then, that gives causality its apparent sequence, where the cause is thought to necessarily precede the effect. Indeed, as Slife (1993) has shown, if the cause were merely before the effect, without some overlap in time (simultaneity), then the cause could never have contact with the effect, and even linear causality would be impossible. Nevertheless, the modernist presumption that causal sequencing is necessary has led to some crucial implications for the free will/determinism issue. Most importantly, this sequence implies that causality can serve as the modernist bridge between the past and the present. Because cause supposedly occurs before effect, causality is considered to be the bridge needed to bring previous events into the present. The present becomes an effect of some cause from the past. This enables modernist theorists to talk about the past in the present, when the (linear) properties of time alone would prohibit this. Although the future is never reached (in a linear framework), it too must always be consistent, in this sense, with causes from the past.

Unfortunately, this causal bridge has an unintended and overlooked consequence. The determinism inherent in causality destroys free will as well as other related constructs such as choice, decision-making, transcendence, agency, self-determination, and self-influence. Because the present and future must be rigidly and deterministically consistent with the past, there is no room for free will or even the possibility of truly self-initiated change in the present. This linear notion of causality—as brought about by the linear notion of time—is the source of the either/or dichotomy for free will and determinism in psychology. Because the past is separated from the present, and because causality is needed to bridge this separation, the present is simply a by-

product, an ending effect of the past. Thus, the import of the present as a separate time dimension is lost. *The present becomes an extension of the immutable past.* The resulting conception is the epitome of determinism in modern psychology. Indeed, as described above, soft deterministic, influence, and degree conceptions of the free will/determinism issue are ruled out in such a modernist framework. If the will is related at all to the past, then that relation is ipso facto a linear causal relation. No mixture of free will and determinism is thus conceivable, and no validity can be granted any mixture that therapists may experience with their clients.

From this modernist perspective, the only way to envision free will or agency in clients (and therapists) is to deny the influence of the past altogether—at least for their free will decisions. This is the reason that theorists have traditionally defined free will as "free of" or "independent of" the past (e.g., Sauvayre, 1995; Viney, 1993, p. 27). Any connection to the past would have to be a causal connection, and a free will would immediately lose its freeness. Given our linear understanding of time and causality, the only conceivable connection between the past and present—the only way that the past can be in the present to influence it—is a causal connection. The present must become an effect of the past. This conception, of course, is totally unacceptable to those who champion free will, because it denies any control over the present. Choices in the informal sense can no longer be choices. People cannot really be held responsible for their behaviors, good or bad. The only way to conceptualize a free will, given the current linear framework for psychology, is to take the radical step of denying the influence of the past altogether for "free will" decisions.

We are thus left with the two horns of the modernist dilemma: Either we embrace the present only (for "free will" decisions) because the influence of the past must be denied, or we embrace the past only (for determinism) because the present must be an extension (via causality) of the past. In either case, this dualistic framework means that we cannot account for our experience of the past permeating the present—in our lives, in our research, and in our therapy. The only means of accounting for this experience is through a causal connection to the past, and

because the linear view of time considers the past to be unchangeable, the present itself—as an effect of that past—is considered to be unchangeable and thus determined. This implication is not a hopeful one for therapy (which, of course, takes place in the present), because it means that all participants in therapy are themselves simply the effects of an unchangeable past. No self-initiated change is therefore possible, even on the part of the therapist.

As described above, some modernists have claimed that this dilemma can be resolved by a "compromise" (cf. Slife, 1994). Why not deny the causal linkage between the past and present and declare that the past merely "influences" rather than "causes" the present? We sympathize with this proposal, because it attempts to capture what many people, including therapists and their clients, actually experience. They experience the influence of the past without any determinism per se. Unfortunately, however, this compromise does not provide a theoretical account for how this influence occurs. It simply re-begs the question of how the past can be in the present—given their separation in linear time—to do any influencing without the bridge of causality. Analyses of such explanations have repeatedly shown that claims of influence ultimately reduce to claims of causation (Rychlak, 1981; 1994; Slife, 1993; Slife, 1994; Slife & Williams, 1995). The dilemma, in this regard, remains the same. However, it is important to remember that this theoretical dilemma is the result of our initial premise of linear time, namely that the three dimensions of time must be considered separate and sequential. Is it possible to begin with a new assumption of time—one that accounts for our experience and research data—and avoid the dilemma altogether?

### A Postmodern Solution

Postmodernists answer this question affirmatively, because alternative views of time are available. We explore one promising view here, though we do not mean to offer it as representative of postmodernism in general. We mean to offer it as one possibility within a prominent postmodern tradition. This particular view of time, referred to as temporality in some texts, was specifically formulated to reflect our lived experience (Gadamer, 1993; Gelven, 1989;

Heidegger, 1962). Many postmodernists in psychology contend that this view not only reflects our lived experiences as professionals (e.g., psychotherapists) but also our research findings as scientists (Faulconer, 1990; Faulconer & Williams, 1990; Fuller, 1990; Slife, 1993, pp. 239-270; Slife, 1997). For instance, temporality is able to welcome all the factors associated with free will and determinism that have demonstrated effectiveness in psychological treatment. No either/or dichotomizing is necessary. Indeed, temporality allows for the past to be a meaningful influence in the present without the present being a mere effect of the past.

Similar to linear time, temporality values the three dimensions of time—past, present, and future—and thus accounts for our experiences of before and after. However, many characteristics of temporality are different from a linear interpretation of time (see Slife, 1993, pp. 239-262 for a direct comparison). Perhaps most importantly for our purposes, temporality does not assume that the dimensions of time are wholly separate from one another. The "line" of linear time is collapsed. The past, present, and future are considered to be simultaneous rather than sequential in nature. As Fuller (1990) characterizes temporality, "our life's temporal moments—alreadiness [past], present, future—are in active communication with one another at any given moment, reciprocally determining one another" (p. 184). Heidegger (1972) put it this way: "The unity of time's three dimensions consists in the interplay of each toward each" (p. 15). The point, for our purposes, is that the past, present, and future are thought to happen "as synchrony, not as diachrony" (Manning, 1993, p. 85).

This synchrony may seem provocative and perhaps even counterintuitive. It is provocative in the sense that it is an unfamiliar, little known assumption of time in comparison to the pervasive, almost axiomatic assumption of linear time. As Heidegger (1962) notes, however, its provocative nature is not because it violates our intuition or experience but rather because it violates a familiar intellectual abstraction—linear time. Although everyone has presumably experienced the direction of change (time), no one has seen the line of time that supposedly marks this change, except as an intellectual abstraction (e.g., a grammar school line

of historic events). That is, Western thinkers have been taught to organize change in a linear manner, but this does not mean that this linear organization is a person's experience of change itself (i.e., linear time is not time itself). On the contrary, Heidegger (1962) and others (Bergson, 1959; Bohm, 1980; Lewin, 1935) claim that time, as experienced, is at least as much simultaneous as sequential.<sup>8</sup> These thinkers do not deny that we experience a sequentiality of sorts, with some events happening—as a narrative—before other events. Still, postmodernists in the Heideggerian tradition do not deny that we experience the simultaneity of time's dimensions.

As already described, many people have a strong intuitive sense that their past pervades their present. Familiarity with things and places is vital to the present. How one interprets events and renders judgments depends upon one's memories and prior information. Memories and information from the past exist completely in the "now." Indeed, this is the reason memories are subject to the vagaries of present moods and circumstances (e.g., Ellis & Hunt, 1989; Loftus & Ketchum, 1991, Loftus, 1993); they occur in the present to be influenced by the present. Some postmodernists also claim that we have an intuitive feeling for the presentness of our future. Many, if not all of one's present actions are oriented toward the future in the sense of expectations, anticipations, and goals. This future is not the unreachable future of the linear theorist. Goals and expectations are present images of the future. They do not exist except in the "now," affecting one's actions in the present and one's memory for the past. Indeed, neither the past nor the future can exist for us experientially except in the present.

Of course, this postmodern present is not the durationless instant of the linear view. This present is often termed by these theorists as the "lived now"—an experienced, practical present that requires as context the lived past and lived future.<sup>9</sup> The present is always "coming from" and "going to" somewhere in Heidegger's (1926/1962) framework. We are always in the midst of a story, a text. However, this coming from and going to does not require separate dimensions of time—the past and future—at least not separate in the sense of linearly sequential and hence independent of one another. The postmodern "now" encompasses all three dimensions,

including our memories and culture (the past) and our anticipations and expectations (the future). Just as the understanding of any moment of a story requires knowing (in the present) what has happened before and anticipating (in the present) what is about to happen, so too any moment of time is considered to require both the synchronous past and co-occurring future. In this sense, then, the simultaneity of the three dimensions of time is not counterintuitive; it is thoroughly intuitive and experiential.

This "experiential" nature of temporality may seem problematic to some psychologists. Some psychologists may prefer a conception of time that is more objective than one based upon lived experience. However, these postmodernists note that linear time is not itself an objective assumption; it is not an object in any conventional sense and thus cannot be objectively observed. Clocks and watches may measure time, but they are not themselves the entity that they presume to measure. Linear time is instead a social construction, an intersubjectively agreed upon construct that has itself been abandoned in many of the natural sciences (Slife, 1993).<sup>10</sup> Linear time has become a very familiar (implicit) assumption, but it as an intellectual abstraction from the perspective of many postmodernists. Temporality is their attempt to be more consonant with practical, concrete experience, including the experiences of psychological researchers (Slife & Williams, 1995).

This alternative framework, with its experiential notions of time, can now be specifically applied to our free will/determinism dilemma. Recall that the root of the dilemma is the separation of the past from the present and future—a linear framework. This means that linear causality, and thus traditional determinism, is necessary to bridge this separation. Modernist theorists are left with the option of either affirming or denying the influence of the past. If this influence is affirmed, then the theorist must view the present as a mere extension of the immutable past; the client and therapist are completely and utterly determined in all their actions and thoughts. If, on the other hand, the influence of the past is denied, then the theorist cuts the present off from the past and makes the present, where therapy supposedly takes place, less

meaningful, if not random and incomprehensible. The client and therapist can only be understood in relation to factors of the durationless present. Furthermore, choices (or one's "free will") cannot be connected to anything in one's past—e.g., experiences, consequences, information—because these choices must be free of the past.

Postmodern temporality, however, changes the theoretical scenery considerably. (It is our contention that it also changes the practical scenery, as we will soon illustrate with a therapy case.) First, theorists and therapists do not have to find some conceptual means of bridging the three dimensions of time, because temporality considers them to co-occur as one temporal whole. Indeed, the postmodernist would contend that each dimension of time cannot, in principle, be understood without the simultaneous context of the other temporal dimensions. No uniting bridge, such as causality, is thus needed. Second, this synchrony of the past and the present does not imply that the present is determined by, or an extension of, the past. Unlike the linear approach, where the past is considered to be static and immutable, the postmodern past is alive and changeable. Just as the present (and future) is typically considered to be alive with possibility, so too the past—with its wedding to the present and future—is similarly thought to be changeable.

Research showing the fragility and changeableness of memory in light of present circumstances and mood only confirms this assumption (e.g., Ellis, 1989; Loftus & Ketcham, 1991; Loftus, Korf, & Schooler, 1989; Slife, Miura, Shapiro, Thompson, & Gallagher, 1984 ). Although this research typically concerns only our personal pasts, the impersonal or "objective" past must also be interpreted by persons (e.g., historians) and is thereby subject to the same vagaries as an individual's past. Some modernists may argue that the past itself has not changed, only one's meaning for the past. This distinction is, again, a result of the modernist's separation of time dimensions. Meaning is considered to be in the present, whereas past events are viewed as in the past. The linear separation of the past and present allows for the separation of memorial events and their meaning. Postmodernists, however, do not separate meaning and

memory, present and past. A memory without some meaning, and a meaning without some memory is considered to be experientially irrelevant, if not ontologically impossible.

What does this postmodern temporality mean for those who champion free will or determinism? First, the aliveness and possibility inherent in postmodern temporality may satisfy many with a free will orientation. Although this is not a traditional free will (in the sense of independent from the past), people and the world are clearly not cast in any deterministic stone. There is plenty of room for change, including qualitative and even holistic forms of change (Slife, 1993, pp. 228-238). Second, this change can never be divorced from the past. Although this connectedness to the past is not a traditional determinism (in the sense of disallowing an "otherwise"), there is always a historic groundedness to any change. Unlike the modernist advocate of free will, persons can never (to any degree) be independent of their history or their tradition. Possibilities, such as choices, options, and opportunities, must always be understood and interpreted in the context of one's past (and future). However, unlike the modern advocate of determinism, history and tradition are often considered to be the very source of possibility and change (Gadamer, 1993). Far from being a rigid determiner of a person's behavior, our history and tradition are thought to be a rich source of options and opportunities.

#### A Postmodern Solution in Practice

At this point, we attempt to elucidate this postmodern approach to the free will/determinism issue through a "case study." Thus far, our discussion has been primarily theoretical, and postmodern approaches are often viewed as more philosophical than practical. Consequently, a case illustration may help us not only "flesh out" the less familiar postmodern assumptions, but also hint at their practical utility. A word of caution, however, is warranted before moving to practice: We do not consider this postmodern framework to be a new school of thought, with new therapeutic techniques and strategies. It is, in a sense, more radical than that. It is, instead, an attempt to capture what effective therapists are already doing and experiencing—intuitively. Consonant with Hoshmand and Polkinghorne's (1992) call for using

practice as a source of knowledge and clinical insight, postmodernists attempt to take seriously the lived experiences of therapists regarding such pivotal issues as free will and determinism. This postmodern approach, then, is an attempt to catch theory up to practice

Consider a young adult woman we will call Mary. She sought psychotherapy because she was struggling with issues surrounding sexual abuse, allegedly perpetrated by her father when she was a child. Mary had recently accepted a job in which she would soon be working near her father, and the anticipated increase in interaction with her father precipitated Mary's entrance into therapy. Although she had never reported it to anyone, Mary believed that her father had inappropriately fondled her on several occasions while he had bathed her as a child. After several sessions of individual therapy, Mary decided to divulge this information to her mother in therapy. Mary's mother, however, insisted that she had been present at the bathings when the alleged abuse had occurred. She denied that abuse of any sort had occurred, though she admitted that Mary's father had touched her genitals with a wash cloth. In fact, she adamantly maintained that she would never have allowed any type of "fondling" to occur. After hearing her mother's account, Mary confessed to "vaguely now remembering flashes" of her mother's presence during the bathings, though Mary still claimed that sexual abuse had occurred.

Therapy now proceeded—on Mary's consent—with both Mary and her mother. At one point in the joint sessions, Mary reported realizing that her memories of the abuse had historically only bothered her when her relationship with her father had been strained. As near as Mary could remember, the abuse was not an issue for her when her relationship with her father was neutral or satisfying. For instance, the abuse was not relevant to her as an adolescent, when she and her father experienced a relatively caring and supportive relationship. She reported that during this period the bathing incidents were "only a dim memory," if she "remembered them at all."<sup>11</sup> Partly at the urging of her mother, Mary decided to confront her father in therapy about the alleged abuse. Mary's father expressed shock and consistently denied

his participation in the alleged abuse. Mary, however, steadfastly maintained her abuse accusations in spite of her father's elaborate denials.

At this juncture, many of the issues of determinism and time were clearly manifested. The argument between Mary and her father was essentially: What actually happened in the past? The answer to this question is, of course, crucial to any modernistic determinism, because the past supposedly determines the present, even when the pivotal events occurred some 20 years earlier. If the abuse occurred, then Mary's father would have been a child abuser; something would have been, and probably still is, wrong with him. Moreover, Mary would have every right to her feelings and the emotional distance she now felt from her father. After all, from a linear causal perspective, she would have no real choice about these feelings; the abusive events would have been responsible for her current feelings and relations with her father. If, on the other hand, the abuse did not occur, then her father would have been vindicated and something probably would have been wrong with Mary. She would have imagined her past, and her feelings and relation to her father would have no factual or causal legitimacy. She presumably would have no right to her feelings, and her actions would have no meaning in relation to her past.

Unfortunately (of fortunately) for Mary and her father, however, their arguments about the nature of the past seemed unproductive. Although evidence and witnesses, such as Mary's mother, were marshalled for both sides, a consistent pattern of accusation and denial emerged between Mary and her father. It was soon apparent to all concerned that this more deterministic tack was leading the therapy nowhere. At this point, Mary's father offered a variation on what can be considered a modernist free will "solution." He pleaded for Mary to "let go" of the past. Without admitting his guilt (or any particular rendition of the past), he proposed that "we all let bygones be bygones" and choose to move beyond the events of 20 years ago. Although Mary confessed that this made logical sense, she found herself psychologically unable to comply with his proposal. She simply could not deny her past; it felt as though she would be denying some

part of herself. Interestingly, Mary's father discovered similar difficulties, because he too could not deny the more immediate past—namely, that his daughter had accused him of abusing her. He could not simply "choose" to forego his resentment toward her. In other words, the past could not be simply "let go," for either Mary or her father. The past was integral to their present relationship and could not be avoided.

Therapy took a distinctly postmodern turn at this juncture. This "turn" began by everyone acknowledging the futility of either debating the reality of the past or letting the meanings of the past go. Therapy moved, instead, to a focus on the "lived now" of Mary's and her father's relationship. Past events per se were not considered to be responsible for Mary's feelings, though the importance of their meaning was never denied. It was simply acknowledged that Mary's actions, thoughts, and feelings were not determined by past events (in the traditional sense). Mary had possibilities. She was not trapped by past events in the present. Interestingly, her remembering that her mother had been present at the bathings—a change from her previous memories of the abuse—seemed to signify her lack of trappedness. Somehow, this memory change implied for Mary a different past, a past of possibility rather than immutability. Mary never questioned her abuse, but somehow her mother's presence—both in the past and in the present—implied possibilities both in the past and in the present.

Two new dimensions of time—the present and the future—were also opened to Mary and her parents in therapy. Although Mary could not ignore "past events" with her father, she could work through their meanings as they affected their current relationship. For the first time, Mary spoke to her father of her current fears and anxieties in dealing with him (in the experiential "now" of the therapy session itself). Several negative (current) conceptions of her father, given her alleged abuse, were explored and processed in light of her "here and now" experiencing of her father. To Mary's surprise, many of these conceptions did not fit her present experiences of her father. By her own admission, she began to know a "different man" than the one signified by her past. As she and her father grew closer, the issues related to the alleged abuse (and her

conceptions of him as a result) became more distant, though they were never "let go." What Mary and her father gained instead was a present way of dealing with these issues.

Mary's future was also explored. After all, it was her expectation of increased contact with her father (because of Mary's upcoming job) that brought Mary into therapy in the first place. From a postmodernist perspective, this expectation was her "future" in the "now." This focus allowed Mary to vocalize her fears of harsh judgment from her father when she assumed the job. Although this vocalization revealed several unresolved conflicts between her and her father, Mary also confessed that these conflicts—possibly the main reason she feared working near her father and sought therapy—had "nothing at all to do with the abuse." To her amazement, these conflicts seemed more connected to her idealized adolescence, when the alleged abuse was, by her account, a "dim memory." In this sense, the most direct route to the problem precipitating therapy was not her past but her future.

### Conclusion

This case is not presented as a "proof" for the efficacy of a postmodern approach to the free will/determinism dilemma. Its main function is to illustrate how a postmodernist in the Heideggerian tradition might deal with some of the typical free will and determinism issues in psychotherapy. As exemplified by Mary and her father wrangling over the events of her alleged abuse, the hunt for an objective, linear past is often elusive, if not unproductive.<sup>12</sup> This hunt is inspired by modernist determinism and linear time where the past—immediate or distant—is viewed as the only source of explanation and understanding. The problem is that therapists rarely, if ever, have direct access to the past. What is often taken to be the objective past is a client's rendition of his or her history or a therapist reasoning backward from a client's symptoms. These strategies are suspect, if not dangerous, as evidenced in the false memory debate (Loftus, 1993; Wakefield & Underwager, 1992). Even if the past is somehow known with certainty, the determinism that underlies these strategies sends many dubious messages to clients regarding their inability for self-control and self-generated change.

Unfortunately, however, the modernist free will focus on the present is equally problematic. This focus cuts off clients, as Mary exemplified, from "parts" of themselves. Recall that her father attempted to heal the relationship by proposing that Mary focus on the present and choose to "let go" of her past. Modernist advocates of free will have assumed that one's will—to be truly one's own will—must be somehow free from the person's past. Otherwise, factors from the immediate past (e.g., stimuli) or distant past (e.g., childhood experiences) supposedly rush in to determine the "will." Although the capacity for such a free will makes self-initiated change possible, it is, as Dennett (1984) says, not a free will worth having. It is a will without a context and without a meaning. It is a present without the context of its temporal siblings—the past and future. Ultimately, Mary and her father found such a will impossible to generate. In both cases, the context and meaning of the past could not be ignored.

Mary's case illustrates the importance of an alternative postmodern framework for these issues. Each dimension of time cannot be understood except in relation to the other dimensions. For instance, Mary's alleged abuse (in the past) was never a problem during harmonious relations with her father (in the present), and it was her future—her upcoming job—that made her abuse the initial focus of therapy. Moreover, Mary's past seemed to be more mutable than immutable. Her lived past was constantly in flux as her present relationship with her father changed. This is not to deny the importance of her past. Her early "abuse" and adolescence were both grounding factors in her current and anticipated interactions with her father. However, this more familiar past-to-present explanation does not require a causal bridge (and thus a determinism) in a postmodern account, because the past and present are not viewed as separate entities that necessitate such a bridge. In this sense, Mary's choices were real choices, but her choices were continually grounded in her temporal history.

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#### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>Some people argue that the many successes of science demonstrate its validity. Nevertheless, this argument still has the same bootstrap problem within it. Citing success merely begs the philosophical question of what one considers success and how one verifies it as success.

<sup>2</sup>Other dualisms that have been identified in modernism include: subject/object, mind/body, apparent/real, belief/action, and theory/practice (Slife & Williams, 1995)

<sup>3</sup>There is a tendency here to want to invoke one of several modernist "solutions" to the all-or-none ideas described here. We take up these attempted solutions in due course later in the paper.

<sup>4</sup>The term "soft determinism" is also used to connote the "permissive" constraint of factors that make up the totality of one's context (and thus are influences) but do not contradict the exercise of a person's agency and thus free will (see Robinson, 1985, p. 61). This type of soft determinism does not address the free will/determinism issue as framed here. Soft determinists of this type are careful to show that such permissive factors are not "determinative," so that agency is possible (e.g., Robinson, 1985, p. 62). In other words, the incompatibility of determinism and free will is implicitly affirmed.

<sup>5</sup>Hard determinism is the notion that all human actions are controlled directly by external or impersonal forces.

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<sup>6</sup>Slife (1993) delineates five overlapping characteristics of explanations that assume linear time: objectivity, continuity, universality, linearity, and reductivity. In separate chapters, he also shows how these characteristics have affected our individual, group, and family therapies.

<sup>7</sup>This claim is confounded by the chicken/egg issues that sometimes confound interpretations of history. Did linear time conceptions lead to linear determinism (efficient causation), or were the positions reversed? Bunge (1959) appears to contend that linear time is more fundamental, because cause and effect work quite well without antecedence (linear sequence). Only the advent of linear time made it seem as though cause and effect required antecedence. Perhaps as Slife (1993) claims, linear time and linear determinism each simultaneously catalyzed the popularity of the other.

<sup>8</sup>It is important to note here that no one, including scientists, get outside their experiences. Our experience of the world--and hence are interpretation of it--is thus crucial for understanding how it is that we conduct and undergo investigations.

<sup>9</sup>Heidegger (1962) shifts the meaning of the present from that in which something occurs to the actual carrying out of an action. Ontologically conceived, the present is making present (Gelven, 1989).

<sup>10</sup>We use traditional subject-object terminology here, but we acknowledge that many postmodernists dissolve, or rather, never assume a subject-object dichotomy in the first place.

<sup>11</sup>Even if Mary's abuse were illusory, it is still important to her and thus important to a postmodernist. On the other hand, if the linear therapist knew for a fact that the abuse did not occur, then this therapist would have no rationale for treating any "effects" of the abuse.

<sup>12</sup>This is not to say that such a hunt is not important to criminal proceedings, etc. A nonlinear approach does not negate the significance of the perpetrator's responsibility for his or her actions. Indeed, unlike mainstream deterministic explanations, it makes responsibility for one's actions possible. It also allows victims not to feel trapped by the actions of others, because the victim's past is changeable and thus not ultimately governed by perpetrators.