

PART THREE

POST-MODERN EPISTEMOLOGY AND C. S. LEWIS

A DIALOGUE

3. INTRODUCTION

Post-modernism is a vast and inter-related web of assumptions and methodologies (Cahoone 1996:13). The vast web of post-modern thought cannot be tied down to one particular underlying manifesto or creed, as the movement is more of a mindset than a packaged system of philosophy (Lyotard 1984:10). The difficulty therefore, of any attempt to define, explain or debate this mind-set, is extremely daunting to any scholar. It must be remembered that post-modern thinking itself is, of its very essence, *a context adapting*, and therefore, extremely *fluid* mindset (Rorty 1991:23). This means, that in order to be positively descriptive on this subject, in any truly objective way, it is essential that the focus remains *general* in examination in order to avoid getting swamped in an ambiguity of definition that is inherent in the *shifting sands* of its contextual relativism. It is my intention in the light of this, to make it clear from the very onset of this dialogue that I have placed certain limitations and perimeters around my definitions and descriptions. It is important that the reader is aware of this fact before reading further under the possible misconception that the present dissertation has *thrown down the gauntlet* and intends to *take on* the ruling philosophical giant of the twenty-first century! The best possible way to begin this dialogue, I believe is by defining two fundamental things as a prologue.

Firstly, it is vital for the reader to recognise my own present and particular understanding of the post-modern mindset that I am addressing, in order to avoid any potential accusation that I am in actuality, contending with my own constructed and convenient *straw man*.

Secondly, the setting out of my perimeters for the discussion at hand is, I believe, essential for a sound reading of this chapter. My intended dialogue will be addressing an admittedly limited and focused area of post-modernism; i.e. its epistemological assumptions. Also, my examination is narrowed down yet further in that I will only focus my attention on where I believe that post-modern epistemology effects evangelical Christianity in a significant and direct way.

There are five epistemological assumptions that I wish to point out that are profoundly effecting academic evangelical Christian scholarship, and through this, filtering down into almost every area of contemporary evangelical life. Missiology, evangelism, Christian morality and ethics procedure, homiletics, and even systematic theology are all undergoing at present a critical re-evaluation and re-defining, due to the prevailing philosophical *zeitgeist* of our era. These five epistemological assumptions are to be the five major divisions in the following dialogue with the extracted epistemology of C. S. Lewis.

3.1 THE SUBJECTIVITY AND FLUIDITY OF TRUTH

'The rationality - but perhaps that word should be abandoned for reasons that will appear at the end of this sentence - which governs a writing thus enlarged and radicalised, no longer issues from a logos. Further, it inaugurates the destruction, not the demolition, but the de-sedimentation, the de-construction of all the significations that have their source in that of the logos. Particularly the signification of truth.' Jacques Derrida, *The End of the Book and the Beginning of Writing* (1974:13).

'Moreover, the very question of truth, the right it appropriates to refute error and oppose itself to appearance, the manner in which it developed (initially made available to the wise, then withdrawn by men of piety to an unattainable world where it was given the double role of consolation and imperative, finally rejected as a useless notion, superfluous, and contradicted on all sides) - does this not form a history, the history of error of an error we call truth?' Michel Foucault, *Nietzsche, Genealogy, History* (1977:145).

'Simplifying to the extreme, I define post-modern as incredulity toward metanarratives. This incredulity is undoubtedly a product of progress in the sciences: but that progress in turn presupposes it. To the obsolescence of the metanarrative apparatus of legitimation corresponds, most notably, the crisis of metaphysical philosophy and of the university

institution which in the past relied on it. The narrative function is losing its functors, its great hero, its great dangers, its great voyages, its great goal. It is being dispersed in clouds of narrative language elements - narrative, but also denotative, prescriptive, descriptive, and so on.' Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Post-modern Condition: A Report on Knowledge (1984:xxiii)*.

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

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

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

MacIntyre writes (1984:204),

Intentions thus need to be ordered both casually and temporally and both orderings will make reference to settings, references already made obliquely by such elementary terms as, 'gardening,' 'wife,' 'book,' and 'tenure'. Moreover, the correct identification of the agent's beliefs will be an essential constituent of this

task; failure at this point would mean failure in the whole enterprise. The conclusion may seem obvious; but it already entails one important consequence. There is no such thing as 'behaviour', to be identified prior to and independently of intentions, beliefs and settings.

Griffin, in his volume, *The Re-enactment of Science*, writes (1988:28),

The idea that truth is a correspondence between statements and objective reality has been subject to a great deal of criticism. Much of this criticism is based upon confusion, inasmuch as the critics, often while verbally rejecting positivism, still presuppose the positivistic equation of the meaning of a statement with the means of its verification. The correspondence notion of truth properly refers only to the *meaning* of 'truth' which is not even identical with the question of knowledge, let alone with the question of the justification of knowledge claims.

What Griffin is saying here, is that although the notion of truth is a necessary element in human thought construction, in the final analysis, truth must be understood as *interpretation* rather than final declaration. The very constitution of the human psyche seems to argue this point in his favour. Can a mind that has been culturally conditioned in a very specific manner do anything *but* approach its concept of truth (which is itself something subjectively discovered) in an entirely subjective manner? The post-modern epistemology argues emphatically, 'no'. And it is because of this conviction that protagonists within the movement consider any objective '*truth claim*' to be *imperialistic* in nature, and something to be exposed as a domineering, manipulating play on power. Jean Francois Lyotard writes on this matter (1984:67),

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

Griffin in his well-read article entitled, *The Reenchantment of Science*, expresses this post-modern concern very clearly (1988:27),

Any activity properly called science and any conclusions properly called scientific, must, first be based on an overriding concern to discover truth. Other concerns will of course play a role, but the concern for truth must be overriding, or the activity and its results would be better called by another name, such as *ideology*, or *propaganda*, or *politics*.

Griffin's concept of 'truth' in his article is, however, something that is humanly constructed (1988:7). Such concern for the 'democratisation' of truth claims, and the protection of human progress from *logocentric imperialism*, has motivated the more militant post-modernist protagonists to actively resist traditional Western claims of human access to an objective reality. Much of the post-modern resistance to Western *Logocentricity* takes place in the area of academia as well as education.

Giroux, a post-modern educator, writes (1991:51),

The Enlightenment notion of reason needs to be reformulated within a critical pedagogy. First, educators need to be sceptical regarding any notion of reason that purports to reveal the truth by denying its own historical construction and

ideological principles. Reason is not innocent and any viable notion of critical pedagogy cannot express forms of authority that emulate totalising forms of reason that appear to be beyond criticism and dialogue. This suggests that we reject claims to objectivity in favour of partial epistemologies that recognise the historical and socially constructed nature of their own knowledge claims and methodologies.

The final result of the above post-modern epistemology, is that the concept of an objective and absolute truth being accessible to the human mind is not only an incorrect conception, but is also a source of imperialistic domination of one particular group over another and therefore needs to be actively resisted for the sake of a universal human freedom of expression (Rowlands 2003:184). This is clearly realised when one observes the ideological motivation that lies behind much post-modern scholarship (i.e. Daniel Bell, *The Coming Post-Industrial Society* 1976, Sandra Harding, *From Feminist Empiricism to Feminist Standpoint Epistemologies* 1986) Behind the post-modern movement is very often, the ideological assumption that society needs to be reformed by means of the devaluation of the previously held Western conceptions of objective access to truth (Rorty 1991:21, Bordo 1987:97). But if this is the case, then it needs to be asked, what alternative system is offered in its place? The answer to this question is *a philosophical mindset of cooperation of inter-subjectivity*. Post-modern contention is that truth is not an existent *thing in itself*, but rather an instrument necessary in the assembling of human value constructs that enable people to function as self-aware and

social beings (Giroux 1991:45). Reality is therefore to be constructed by the individual independent of *logocentric* authority, according to linguistic and cultural conceptions and value. DeLashmut and Braund write (McCallum 1996:99),

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

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

3.2 **THE IMPACT OF POST-MODERN EPISTEMOLOGY UPON
EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANITY**

- a) A loss of the Christian Church's unique credibility in contemporary Western society. With the decline of Western modernistic confidence at the turn of the twenty-first century, objective dogmatism is not only doubted, but in many circles, openly frowned upon (Blanchard 2000:232). This has resulted in a negative impact upon Christianity as a religion of dogmatic confession. Where the Church was previously regarded, even by its Western secular governments, as being the necessary moral authority of society (Brooke 1998:35), there has recently been a major shift towards an ethics of relativism and, in the major Western nations, a more open adherence to an inter-cultural and inter-faith consensus (Brooke 1998:35). The general trend in religious academic circles is today, often concerned with addressing its own devaluation in a world of inter-culturalism, where any dogmatic claims to absolute truth are frowned upon as being *logocentric*, intolerant, and imperialistic (Brooke 1998:56). The very idea of all faiths possessing equal and ontological validity is absolutely alien to the message of orthodox Christianity. Blanchard writes (2000:226),

There are obviously social and moral issues on which the followers of different religions can usefully unite, but this can hardly validate their religion, because there are issues on which the same stance could be

taken by many atheists. To illustrate this very simply, and at a personal level, an act of kindness by an atheist is just as valuable to the beneficiary as one performed by a theist, but it is a long way from saying that all religions are essentially the same. The simple fact is that all religions *cannot* be the same. To be so, they would need to be united on the very issues on which they are most widely divided: the existence and nature of God.

With the prevailing post-modern *zeitgeist* widely influencing religious thinking, evangelical Christianity is being pressured into either reinterpreting its previously held exclusivist and proselytising stance (see following point), or in a reactionary manner, to withdraw from academia and resort to mystical and occultic justification for its existence (Horton 1993:265) (see point 1.a.iii).

- b) A call to redefine evangelical definitions and methodologies. Within evangelical circles it is evident that some evangelical thinkers regard themselves as being pressured into re-defining their particular world-view in order to accommodate post-modern epistemological pre-suppositions (Murray 2001:173). An example of this response to post-modern effect upon evangelical Christianity may be demonstrated from the following quotation (Codrington *South African Baptist Journal of Theology* 1999:131),

Post-modernism is the context in which we will work to a greater extent as the years roll on. Young people who come to faith need help

recognising the current worldview for what it is - not always helpful, but definitely there. They need to be taught 'faith development skills' which takes nurture, resources, relationships and professionals. Faith development skills are about making faith work, answering questions, helping young people understand why God's word says what it says, and how to apply the obvious and work out the implied. It means taking serious the experiential and the cognitive - not merely answering, 'it is the Bible, and so its true' - but rather, 'it is the Bible because its true and best and it works.

Codrington is saying here that in our present post-modern era, Christian leaders need to adapt by means of re-structuring their traditional dogmatic and declarative evangelistic methodology and replacing it with an evangelism that appeals to the existential and the pragmatic. Such a restructuring is now widely practiced, and can be witnessed in various different areas of contemporary evangelical life. An example of the above paradigm shift may be seen in recent evangelical movements such as the *Church Growth Movement* and the *Gospel of Positive Affirmation* (see Richard Mayhue *Taking the Church to Doctor's Surgery, Sword and Trowel* 2000:9).

- c) A replacing of systematic theology with mystical experience and the occult. In the past two decades of the previous century, an influential school of thought has gained accreditation within evangelical circles. This school has commonly been referred to as

the Spiritual Warfare Movement. This movement proposes a world-view that at first glance appears in its terminology to be comfortably 'in line' with evangelical thinking. The protagonists of this movement all claim to be conservative in their theology and that they are merely emphasising in their message a previously neglected biblical truth. The Spiritual warfare Movement is increasingly being accepted and welcomed into many evangelical churches as a timely guide and teacher in the evangelical mainstream. The influence and growth of the movement in the Western world is quite phenomenal - especially considering the fact that it has not been in circulation for more than twenty years or so. The present popularity of spiritual warfare seminars which discuss '*satanic strongholds*' and strategies for deliverance - increasing calls to prayer groups for the purpose of the strategic '*mapping*' of '*spiritual strongholds*' the abundance of such material now packing Christian bookshops - books, tapes, videos, - the trend towards organised interdenominational '*prayer marches*' and mass gatherings, intended to *break down demonic power* over cities and nations. The distinguishing mark of the above movement is its severance from the traditional approach to hermeneutics and systematic theology. There is an underlying source that is impacting the evangelical world in no superficial way. It is not a difficult task to discover one of the major motivations behind this

movement. Kim Riddelbarger writes (Horton 1992:269), ‘Another factor that demonstrates the depth of the uneasy relationship between evangelicals and the surrounding culture is the massive growth of the Christian subculture.’ To many evangelicals, the challenge of post-modern epistemology has deprived them of a confident *kerugmatik* objectivity and justification for their very existence (McCallum 1996:199). The response of many evangelicals to post-modern epistemology has been an abandonment of a previously confidently adhered-to systematic theology, and a paradigm shift towards an emphasis into the mystical. It requires little imagination to recognise the *cause - effect* relationship between a subjective and arbitrary post-modern epistemology and a subjective and arbitrary approach to Christianity. Riddelbarger writes (Horton 1992:278),

The huge popularity of Frank Peretti's *This Present Darkness* and its sequel, *Piercing the Darkness*, reveals a sense of uneasiness and fear of the world in what I consider a disturbing trend...Because the intended audience is sometimes ill-informed about the purpose of the genre of fiction and the reasons for telling a compelling story simply to entertain, many who read Peretti's fictional account of spiritual warfare possess little ability to discern between truth and fiction. People have in many cases, actually redefined their entire worldview based upon a novel, instead of developing a view of the supernatural from the clear *non-fictional* teaching of scripture.

3.3 IS TRUTH SUBJECTIVE AND FLUID?

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

Men became scientific because they expected Law in Nature, and they expected Law in Nature because they believed in a Legislator. In most modern scientists this belief has died: it will be interesting to see how long their confidence in uniformity survives it. Two significant developments have already appeared - the hypothesis of a lawless sub-nature and the surrender of the claim that science is true. We may be living nearer than we suppose to the end of the scientific age.

It is evident that Lewis knew full well what the foundational premise would be of the eventual successor to modernism - the denial of objectivity. The entire post-modern ethos may be verbally encapsulated in these words. The post-modern argument, on philosophical grounds, seems irrefutable. It cannot be denied that all systematic human thinking begins and ends as subjective experience. It is also an undeniable fact that any human conception of reality believed to be outside of subjective experience must inevitably be conceptualised through the *lenses* of that particular subjective experience (Appignanesi and Garratt 2003:79). Further, in the light of the previous two sentences, it must be admitted that any claim to a human accessibility to a reality that is absolute in nature (i.e. *truth*) is an epistemological absurdity (Bordo 1987:97). *Truth claims*, to post-modern thinking, are to be resisted in the post-modern society as imperialistic

power-plays (Giroux 1991:51), which are able to be used by the oppressor to rule over and dominate the oppressed (Appignanesi and Garratt 2003:78, Lyotard 1984:67). From what has been written above, we may infer two main contentions in the post-modern position on truth; firstly, truth, as it exists outside of human conscious subjectivity, is absolutely inaccessible. Any human conception of truth must be recognised as being at best, merely *interpretive* in nature. Secondly, that any absolute *truth claim*, is ultimately motivated by political, economic, or social dominance, and this, for moral reasons, should be resisted (Appignanesi and Garratt 2003:87).

This however poses a profound challenge to the Christian faith, more especially to evangelicalism, which exists on the claim to be a custodian of ultimate and revealed truth. The dilemma that post-modernism presents to evangelicalism is this; either it must deny and resist post-modern epistemological claims (and to do this would amount to retreating from reasonable argument) by appealing to a mystical irrationality, or it must make its doctrinal content more compatible to post-modern epistemology (see previous paragraph). It would appear at face value, that there can be no possible *third option* out of the dilemma, I believe however, that there is. The epistemology of C. S. Lewis (discussed in chapters two to four in the first part of this dissertation), supplies a rational and philosophically sound answer to the post-modern epistemological dilemma on truth.

Lewis' argument for truth's objective accessibility is a positive one. It is grounded in the *derivative* and *dependant* nature of human experience to the *cosmos* that is exterior to it. Human thought, Lewis argued, always presupposes (albeit often unconsciously), a prior frame of reference that underlines its very exercise. For example, time, three-dimensional space, matter, in its various forms, energy, in its various modes, all *pre-exist* and *pre-determine* the individual human mind's functioning process. As a mould pre-determines the figure moulded, so the human mind is inseparably related to the cosmos that has formed and regulated it. Consequentially, human consciousness corresponds in an intimate and related manner with the universe that it experiences. This cannot be denied. Even a deluded madman thinks in terms of 'me' and 'you' - 'when' and 'how' - all of these words being derived from the three-dimensional, cosmic source. Just as linguistic communication is not possible without a prior and under-lying vocabulary, grammar, and syntax, so thought is not possible without the underlying rationality (intelligent or accidental) of the human life support - the *cosmos*. Lewis writes (*Christian Reflections* 1991:88),

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

In an article entitled, “Religion without Dogma” (*Timeless at Heart* 1991:95), Lewis writes,

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

In an article entitled, “Bulverism” (*First and Second Things* 1985:18), Lewis writes,

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

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

sustains it, constitutes a human experience of objective truth. Lewis explains (*God in the Dock* 1990:35),

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

The human experience of thought, in other words, is related to the cosmos, to use an analogy, as a *reflection* is related to its *substance*. As a mirror's reflection may be unclear and distorted in its reflecting, it remains a derivative of, and comparable with, the form that is casting the reflection. This very position, is used by the German theologian Emil Brunner in his systematic theology in order to illustrate the significance of the theological term, *Imago Dei* (Brunner 1966:55). Lewis argues that this co-relationship between the thinker and the thinker's life-supporting frame of reference, is an essential clue to the validity of at least *some measure* of objectivity in human thinking. He writes (*Christian Reflections* 1990:89), 'Where thought is strictly rational, it must be in some odd sense, not ours, but cosmic or super cosmic.' And it is at this stage that I am personally convinced (and I believe Lewis would point it out), that post-modern epistemology betrays a significant flaw in its argument. Post-modern epistemology fails to recognise, it appears to me, the ontological *duality* of human rational

experience. Both *substance* and its *reflection* are confounded together as one in their contention. The *reflection* in other words, denies any significant and measurable conscious awareness of its *substance*. Post-modern epistemology begins and ends exclusively, it seems, with the subjectivity of the thinker, and from this starting-point (quite rightly), denies any possible cognitive access to anything that may be exterior to that. Lewis would challenge the contention at this point as being unreasonably reductionist in nature, and incomplete as a philosophical theory. The Lewisian challenge may not be taken seriously by those who would insist upon a totally solipsist epistemology, but this being the case, a philosophical consistency is called for. Lewis '*bolts the escape routes*' for those who would deny any objectivity in thinking and yet insist upon '*proving their point*' in a rational manner. He writes to those who would suggest that they are able to construct rational arguments, which contend for the irrationality of human minds (*Christian Reflections* 1991:102),

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

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

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

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

There is therefore no question about a total scepticism about human thought. We are always prevented from accepting total scepticism because it can be formulated only by making a tacit exception of the thought we are thinking at the

moment - just as the man warns the newcomer 'Don't trust anyone in this office' always expects you to trust him at that moment. Whatever happens then, the most we can do is to decide that certain types of human thought are 'merely' human or subjective, and others not. However small the class, some class of thoughts must be regarded not as mere facts about the way human brains work, but as true insights, as the reflection of reality in human consciousness.

It is here that post-modern epistemology still needs to, within a defensible paradigm, explain its motivation and justify its epistemological claims. It would seem that an epistemology that denies any access to rational objectivity has denied itself, by its very own contention, the right to make any objectively rational claims at all, and yet, surprisingly, this is what is being done.

a) **The Post-modern Epistemological Argument Syllogistically**

Summarised

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

3.4 **IS TRUTH SOMETHING HUMANLY CONSTRUCTED?**

‘The essential political problem for the intellectual is not to criticise the ideological contents supposedly linked to science, or to ensure that his own scientific practice is accompanied by a correct ideology, but that of ascertaining the possibility of constituting a new politics of truth. The problem is not changing people’s consciousness - or what’s in their heads - but the political, economic, institutional regime of the production of truth.’
Michel Foucault, *Truth and Power* (1972:133).

‘Every society has always existed on the basis of knowledge, but only now has there been a change whereby the codification of theoretical knowledge and materials science becomes the basis of innovations in

technology. One sees this primarily in the new science-based industries - computers, optics, polymers - that mark the last third of the century.'

Daniel Bel, *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society* (1976:xvi).

'Language games would then be games for perfect information at any given moment. But they would also be non-zero-sum game, and by virtue of that fact discussion would never risk fixating in a position of minimax equilibrium because it had exhausted its stakes. For the stakes would be knowledge (or information, if you will), and the reserve of knowledge - languages reserve of possible utterances - is inexhaustible. This sketches the outline of a politics that would respect both the desire for justice and the desire for the unknown.' Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Post-modern Condition: A report on Knowledge* (1984:67).

Consequential to post-modern scepticism regarding human access to any absolute truth, is the conviction that all experienced reality needs to be constructed and filtered into a particular coherent and systematised world-view in order for not only psychological stability, but also social stability to be ensured. It is accepted that as the human being is not regulated instinctively, the imposition of an extra-sentient regulator of behaviour is necessary. On the other hand, because human experience has no access to any extra-sentient absolute, it is linguistic and cultural programming that imposes a reality and value system (McCallum 1996:97). Truth, in other

words, is for an individual, something that has been constructed linguistically and culturally (Rorty 1991:23). In the light of this fact, many post-modern facilitators and educators consider it their particular task in the post-modern world, to impose such values upon their subjects that would ensure optimum psychological and social effect. Negative anti-social values such as prejudice, intolerance, competition, and criminality, need to be *conditioned out* of an individual living in an increasingly multi-cultural and transforming society. Post-modern educational theorist Henry A. Giroux writes (1991:49),

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

The post-modern educational ideal is to impose a value-system upon its students that ensures optimum psychological and social behaviour in the new multi-cultural global *village* (Appignanesi and Garratt 2003:78). The glaring failures of Western civilisation to ensure justice, equality and world

peace motivate such sentiment. The ideological basis underlying post-modern thinking is therefore justified by its protagonists by reference to the inequalities that are abundantly inherent in the social systems of industrialised Western world with its modernistic ideological reinforcement. David Hall writes (1991:58),

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

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

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

Post-modern social theory therefore seeks to dismantle modernistic absolutes in order to establish a world of eventual contentment, tolerance and inter-cultural cooperation. In order to achieve this goal, Western

arrogance and domination (usually regarded as the white, male, plutocrat), needs to be devalued and put on a par with other, equally valid world-views (Lyotard 1991:64). Educational theorist Gary DeLashmut describes the intention and process (McCallum 1996:11),

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

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

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

It is certainly not the present writer's intention to trivialise or even to disagree with post-modern ideological sentiment. However, because post-modern epistemology emphatically denies any possible human access to reality exterior to subjective experience, a fundamental philosophical discrepancy flaws their ideal. It is at this point that it is again necessary to bring in the epistemology of C. S. Lewis in order to critically dialogue post-modern ideology. It may be remembered (see part one of this dissertation) that not only Lewis, but the titan philosopher Immanuel Kant had argued for the possibility of some human access to *extra-conscious* reality, due to what has been termed the *Categorical Imperative* - that is, an intuitive human awareness of a universal and categorical *right* and *wrong* (Bubner 1997:41). Lewis writes, (*Christian Reflections* 1991:78), 'Kant was perfectly right at that point at least: the imperative is categorical. Unless the ethical is assumed from the onset, no argument will bring you to it.' If there is, as both Kant and Lewis contend, an overarching ethical imperative, that is, some norm of value that is universally and categorically recognised, then it is perfectly legitimate for one to desire the imposition of a universal justice, tolerance and equality. To desire an end to oppression and prejudice, and to devise ways and means of ensuring a better world for all, however, can only be universally legitimate, as long as a categorical imperative is firstly recognised. One cannot expect and demand the rules of chess to be applied to skittles! And it is here that post-modern ideology, based upon a total subjectivity, finds itself

unjustified. Lewis, in his 1943 lectures later published as a book entitled, *The Abolition of Man*, terms the *categorical imperative*, the *Tao* (see part one, chapter two). In this book, he anticipates the arrival of a post-scientific mindset (some thirty years before it came about). C. S. Lewis scholar, Walter Hooper considers this particular work to be the finest piece of Christian apologetics ever written (1977:65) Lewis writes in prophetic anticipation of post-modern epistemology (1977:32),

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

The thesis of Lewis' above book, is that nothing ethical or moral in human behaviour may be expected or demanded, unless it is firstly universally agreed that a related categorical imperative exists. Ethics is *a paradigm, a language game, a system*, that has to be submitted to before any claim of *right or wrong* can be considered universally legitimate. In the light of this, Lewis has vital relevance to the present debate on post-modernism and epistemology. He writes (*Christian Reflections* 1991:78),

I deny that we have any power to make a new ethical system. I assert that whatever and whenever ethical discussion begins, we have already before us an ethical code whose validity has to be assumed before we can even criticise it.

For no ethical attack on any of the precepts can be made except on the ground of some other traditional precept. You can attack the concept of justice because it interferes with the feeding of the masses, but you have taken the feeding of the masses from the world-wide code. You may exalt patriotism at the expense of mercy; but it was the old code that told you to love your country. You may vivisect your grandfather in order to deliver your grandchildren from cancer: but take away the traditional morality, and why should you bother about your grandchildren?

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

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

The post-modern response to this challenge, seems to be that ethical and even rational imperatives need not be, as traditionally claimed, something *extra-human*, but may just as well be justified along pragmatic grounds, made valid by consensus (McCallum 1996:41). In other words, the prevailing mindset of a particular culture decides what *right* and *wrong* means, on purely pragmatic grounds. Pioneer post-modernist, Alistar Macintyre writes (1984:204),

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

In other words, where it may be asked, 'by what standard does post-modernism decide a *right* or a *wrong* proposition or action?' Macintyre (somebody who is widely acknowledged to be representative of post-modern epistemology) would answer, 'Right and wrong are measured by the maximum *good* or *bad* effecting existential authenticity on a social level.' Charles Jencks explains that post-modern values are justified as long as they (1986:20), '...will support relative absolutism, or fundamental holism, which insists on the developing and jumping nature of scientific growth, and the fact that all propositions of truth are time-and-context sensitive.' What this means, is that post-modern values are considered as

being *valid*, as long as they fall agreeably within, and can be justified by the paradigm of social post-modern epistemology. It is therefore, an *inter-subjective* consensus that justifies and vindicates, to post-modernity, what is *right* and *wrong*, *true* and *false*.

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

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

for the preservation of the species by adopting a moral code? Why should this instinct be preferred to all my others? It is certainly not my strongest.

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

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

The post-modern epistemological claim that each individual cultural consensus is sufficient to justify the words, *right* and *wrong*, does not ring true upon critical examination. Dennis McCallum provides a helpful case-study that will help argue this point (1996:270),

This scenario raises more complicated contradictions for the post-modern thinker. Female circumcision is a manifestation of misogyny and control of women. The procedure guarantees women will never experience orgasm, and therefore, will take no pleasure in sex. In the words of one African apologist, the practice 'frees women from their bondage to lust to find their true identity as

mothers'. The girls have little or no say in whether they receive the procedure. Viewed objectively, this practice is a savage and brutal violation of women, as feminists have rightly pointed out.

But there's a problem. Female circumcision is also a time honoured rite of passage in another culture - in an oppressed, non-Western, non-white culture at that. It is therefore off limits to post-modern judgement of any kind. In culturally post-modern groups, we often find those who agree with their tour guide. They feel we cannot judge this situation because we have no context from which to view it other than our own cultural reality. Someone might suggest that we can't force our view on them, but this is a different point. The question is not how to change their culture - by force or by persuasion - but *whether we should even try*. Some post-modern-influenced thinkers are confused by this dilemma, while the more militant post-modernists are clear: we cannot judge their social reality. Condoning clitorectomies naturally makes the women in the group nervous.

We have to agree that for us to judge events in another culture isn't possible apart from the existence of a moral absolute that applies to all cultures, whether it is acknowledged or not. When we put such a point on it, the post-modernists' position either hardens or begins to soften.

Finally, we are ready to consider one more example: What about Hitler's Germany? They had a rich cultural heritage of anti-Semitism, including killing Jews, that went back for centuries. Were we wrong to judge Nazi culture and intervene militarily to stop what we considered oppression?

Post-modern scholarship to my knowledge has not as yet addressed this question. It becomes apparent to a perhaps morbid and paranoid thinker, that here, with post-modern epistemology, we have the opportunity for a perfect *Big Brother* scenario. A scenario where arbitrary values and

imperatives are imposed upon a plastic and uncritical society. Such potential mind-control would make the propaganda machine of Nazi Germany or Maoist Communist China seems relatively democratic. Lewis writes (the Abolition of Man 1977:48),

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

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

Firstly, He points out the fact that the values and ideology of post-modernism have been, as it were, 'borrowed' from the traditional value system. To ask the question, why justice and equality are the objectives of

post-modern ideology can only be answered in an arbitrary way if the post-modernist is to remain consistent to the sceptical epistemology.

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

3.4.1 SUMMARY OF THE DIALOGUE THUS FAR

Post-modern epistemology teaches that because human consciousness is absolutely bound within its own cultural and linguistic subjectivity, the very idea of any human access to an absolute truth is to be rejected as an absurdity. Post-modernism holds that in the light of this, any objective truth claim made, should be regarded with suspicion, and resisted as *logocentric* imperialism.

It is upon this assumption, that it is hoped the new multi-cultural *global village* will find its motivation for living in a society of tolerance and equal rights. The problem with this assumption however, is that in order to discredit all forms of *modernistic* objective thinking, post-modernism has cancelled out its very own epistemological validity! If no proposition whatsoever can ever be objectively validated or even considered, then on what grounds, can post-modernism claim its own epistemological contention? There can only be one of two possible options taken here. Either an absolute and arbitrary *solipsism* is to be opted for, or some justification needs to be supplied. Many post-modernist protagonists opt for the latter, and would agree that the above objection indeed points out a logical self-contradiction, yet they reject the claim that this effectively refutes their position's validity. How they answer the charge of logical self-refutation is as follows; The charge of self-refutation, they say, is grounded upon *logocentric* and rationalistic assumptions, and because post-modern epistemology stands *outside* of that particular paradigm, it need not be subject to its rules and restrictive limitations.

The burden of proof therefore, lies with the post-modern epistemological claim. Can it indeed make such an exception in regard to its own philosophical contentions? Is post-modern

epistemology exempt from logical and rational criticism? In order to justify this claim for exemption, it has to establish the fact that there indeed does exist a *zone of exemption*, an alternative conception of reality to the one held by traditional rationality.

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

3.5 **IS OBJECTIVE MEANING RENDERED INACCESSIBLE BY LANGUAGE?**

'Thinking is on the descent to the poverty of its provisional essence. Thinking gathers language into simple saying. In this way, language is the language of Being, as clouds are clouds of the sky. With its saying, thinking lays inconspicuous furrows into language. They are still more inconspicuous than the furrows that the farmer, slow of step, draws through the field.' Martin Heidegger, *Letter on Humanism* (1977:242).

'All language, at its fundamental level, may be nothing more than an undulating sea of suggestiveness.' David Hall, *Modern China and the Post-modern West* (1991:66).

'I see now that these nonsensical expressions were not nonsensical because I had not yet found the correct expressions, but that their nonsensicality was their very essence. For all I wanted to do with them was just to go beyond the world and that is to say beyond significant language. My whole tendency and I believe the tendency of all men who ever tried to write or talk Ethics or Religion was to run against the boundaries of language. This running against the walls of our cage is perfectly, absolutely hopeless.' Ludwig Wittgenstein, (1965:12).

Post-modern theory holds that all human thinking is the direct result of social programming by means of the symbolism and language within a particular culture. All mental activity, in the final analysis, is due to language (Lyotard 1984:100). As human beings, we both think our thoughts and communicate them in the words and grammatical system of a particular system of symbols, or language (Derrida 1974:14). Benjamin Whorf, a pioneer of post-modern thinking, in his work, *Language, Thought, and Reality*, (1956:43), expresses the position in this way,

The forms of a person's thought, are controlled by inexorable laws of pattern of which he is unconscious. These patterns are the unperceived intricate systematisations of his own language...Every language is a vast pattern system, different from others, in which are culturally ordained forms and categories by which the personality not only communicates, but also analyses nature, notices or neglects types of relationship or phenomena, channels his reasoning, and builds the house of his consciousness.

Post-modern theory is primarily based upon this understanding. Linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857 - 1913), had paved the way for such an epistemology when, in his major work, *Course in General Linguistics*, he had demonstrated how the *significance* that is humanly ascribed to any *symbol*, will always be inescapably bound together with the subjectivity that ascribes the significance (Saussure 1966:68). One cannot, in other words, consider a word like, for example, *love*, without also taking into consideration the *person* that is using the word, as well as the *context* in which the word is being utilised, as well as *to whom* the word is being

addressed. *Signification* therefore, always precedes the word itself. There can be little significant objection to the above contention, especially having first admitted the absolute sentient subjectivity through which human consciousness always functions. Language, therefore, is regarded as the 'scaffolding' that supports all human thought. Without language, human thought is not possible. It is at this point that post-modern epistemology directly poses as a serious challenge to evangelical Christian thinking, a system that is based entirely upon a supposed universally categorical, and relevant book, written in ancient Hebrew and Greek. Language, to the post-modernist, is something that has been *subjectively absorbed*, from within a particular cultural *pool* of language - one inherits one's thought patterns and value systems, in the final analysis, from the particular language system one was brought up in - and from one's own language paradigm, one can never escape. Scholar Jim Leffel considers this post-modern epistemology *a linguistic prison-house*, where the human mind is ultimately locked into its own cultural subjectivity. He suggests that human thought is twice imprisoned, once, in the prison of *semantics*, and then secondly, in the prison of *syntax* (McCallum 1996:38). He writes regarding the 'prison of semantics',

We confuse perceptions with reality. If we say, for example, 'the room is hot,' we unconsciously substitute perception for reality, subjectivity for objectivity. We should say, 'the room *'appears'* to be hot,' or 'I *perceive* it to be hot.' Instead, by stating perceptions as though they were reality our words actually insulate us from reality. We confuse the symbol - words - with reality. We think we

understand something because we have formed a word for it. As cultures accept definitions of words, they solidify the confusion between the symbolic and the real.

Culturally imposed thinking, because it is imposed linguistically, inevitably closes an individual into the '*air-tight vacuum*' of semantics. One's own conception of reality is inherited by one's culture, and submitted to the very moment that a person is taught the particular meanings of certain words in a language's vocabulary. Also, the wider and more complex a particular language's vocabulary might be, the more complex the mind will be able to think and conceptualise. One is therefore, in a very real sense, imprisoned within the semantics of one's own language. Secondly, Leffel suggests that the human mind is also imprisoned within the syntax of a language. He writes (McCallum 1996:39),

If semantics, the meaning of words, subverts our impressions of reality, then syntax does the same for our reasoning about reality. Syntax is the structure of a language, the rules for using language. Post-modernists claim that syntax, by governing the way we relate words to each other, establishes logic within language. Yet they go on to argue that the logic of language effectively overthrows the laws of objective reason itself...We categorise perceptions and thoughts based on the language we use. And since the logic (syntax) of one language cannot be applied to the logic (syntax) of another, we are confronted with separate, culturally isolated systems of thinking. This difference between systems goes beyond the fact that cultures say different things. They actually think in different ways because their languages arrange and interpret ideas differently, according to post-modernists.

To post-modern epistemological theory, the very way in which a person comes to an inferred conclusion depends primarily upon the particular syntactical pattern in the thinker's own linguistic system. Derrida (1974:15), explains it like this, 'Every linguistic unit (i.e. word in a language) is bipartite and involves both aspects - one sensible, and the other intelligible...These two constituents of a linguistic sign necessarily require and suppose each other.' Language in other words is about the mental application of significance to symbols that represent reality (Lyotard 1984:47). This helps the post-modern anthropologist explain the reason why certain language groups of the world are more warlike than others, or why the Western language groups are more inclined to materialist rationality than the indigenous peoples of the world (Pierce 1996:24). Syntax, according to post-modern epistemology, *channels the reasoning flow* of an individual's thought. Where semantics provides a thinker's structure, syntax directs a thinker's flow of reasoning (McCallum 1996:38). The result of an epistemology that is based upon semantics and syntax, obviously not only encapsulates each individual within his/her own cultural monad of consciousness, but also renders any mind-set that is objectively evangelistic, redundant. 'On what grounds,' post-modernism argues, 'may one particular language group impose its own linguistic system upon another?' And it is here that Christianity faces a huge challenge.

3.5.1 The practical effect of post-modernism's devaluation of objective language upon evangelical Christianity

A major shift in recent evangelical thinking, has been an increasing call from many evangelical academics, pastors, and teachers, to make twenty-first century Christianity more pragmatically *relevant* to the secular world that it seeks to evangelise. Orthopraxy is being preferred in many evangelical circles over orthodoxy (Murray 2001:214). Perhaps one or two references from conservative evangelical thinkers within my own denomination on the above topic will illustrate adequately what I am saying here. In the *South African Baptist Journal of Theology* (1999:41), E. Tian Foshaugen wrote an article that addressed the very post-modern epistemological challenge to evangelism that is being discussed here. Foshaugen writes, 'In a post-modern world of no absolutes, where interest in 'spirituality' is growing, the Church needs to ensure it practices a relevant and contemporary spirituality to fulfill its commission as reflected in Mt. 28:18-20.'

The call to meet the challenge of post-modernism by being relevant is commendable. Foshaugen then proceeds by defining his framework, 'This study proceeds from the assumption that in worship, the spirituality of a person/Church is both formed and revealed. Worship, as a way of life, is dependant on the way in

which spirituality is defined and practiced.’ Notice in this passage, that ‘*worship*’, is described as being dependant on something both ‘*defined*’ and ‘*practiced*’ This can only mean that the *perceived significance* of ‘*worship*’, and the lived-out expression of this perceived significance, is ontologically what worship ultimately amounts to. This definition of worship stands in perfect agreement with post-modern epistemology, as being something that has been assigned significance by conscious but concurred subjectivity. Foshaugen continues (1999:41), ‘Worship, spirituality, and the Christian faith become synonyms for each other.’ Here we find a subtle but definitive shift in emphasis. Whereas historical orthodoxy insisted that the Christian faith consists of a confessional adherence to the objective *deposit* of a verbal revelation that is encapsulated in creeds and confessions (Heppe 1978:16), Foshaugen contends that Christian faith is merely ‘*synonymous*’ with the subjective experience of worship. He then goes on to call the Christian Church to a more practical and existential approach to evangelism. He writes (1999:50), ‘There is a need for the development of a holistic spirituality - a spirituality that integrates the Christian experiences of God, in relation to themselves and the post-modern world they live in.’ It cannot be denied that here is an example of how post-modern epistemology has fundamentally

influenced, and virtually re-defined the understanding of Christian faith.

In the same edition of *The South African Baptist Journal of Theology*, 1999 edition, Swartz and Codrington write an article on the necessity of reforming evangelistic methodologies for the youth programmes, in conformity to the post-modern mindset. Dogmatic and objective declarations of right and wrong need to be replaced with a more inter-subjective approach (1999:132). The post-modern epistemology is in no superficial way profoundly effecting the previously confident objectivity of evangelical evangelism, as the two above examples show. Dennis McCallum writes,

Evangelicals today are being tempted to make the same mistake liberals and neo-orthodox leaders made earlier with modernism. they are tempted to jettison or at least minimise the importance of propositional truth - statements of fact that can be confirmed or denied by reason and evidence. In a day when propositional, objective truth is considered 'fundamentalist,' 'intolerant,' 'exclusive,' Christians are enticed to view it as a nuisance, especially if they crave popularity from the rest of our culture.

The result of post-modern epistemology upon evangelical thinking has been one that is undeniably reducing confidence in an objective and universally categorical *kerugma*, and ensuring an

evangelical *retreat* into more pragmatic fields of relevance (Horton 1992:56).

3.5.2 Post-modern Semantics and Syntax, and C. S. Lewis

Post-modernism is able to make its epistemological claim, simply because it is absolutely reductionist in its pre-suppositions. A representative view of this can be seen in Henry A. Giroux's paper, *Towards a Post-modern Pedagogy* (1991:52). Here, he writes, 'Knowledge has to be constantly re-examined in terms of its limits, and rejected as a body of information that only has to be passed down to students.' To the post-modernist, *truth* is a mere social and existential *construct*. *Reality*, is merely a matter of interpretation. All human knowledge, they would claim, can be explained by the discipline of linguistics. It is with confidence that I believe that C. S. Lewis would passionately resist such claims. Lewis was certainly not naive in this matter. He was fully aware of the contextual fluidity of language. In a paper entitled, *Modern Translations of the Bible*, he writes (*First and Second Things* 1985:87), 'There is no such thing as translating a book into another language once and for all, for language is a changing thing. If your son is to have clothes it is no good buying him a suit once and for all: he will grow out of it and have to be re-clothed.' There was no doubt in Lewis' mind that language is a '*living and fluid thing*'. Because Lewis was a

thorough-going supernaturalist, however, he would most definitely reject post-modern epistemological reductionism. Lewis saw human self-consciousness as being something that has been derived from a *pre-moulding, pre-human source*, and as something dependant upon this source for its very existence (*Miracles* 1990:119). The self-consciousness of a human being related to this pre-existing source, by analogy, as a wax imprint corresponds to its seal. Lewis would indeed argue that there has to be acknowledged some kind of a *cause* and *effect* inter-relationship existing between human consciousness and its pre-existing life-support system. This inter-relationship, it would appear, is totally ignored in post-modern epistemology. Post-modernist epistemology begins with the existential experience of humanity - a *monad* of sensation and language (McCallum 1996:12). It can not but be admitted that human thinking is closed within a linguistic prison of semantics and syntax, if such a claim is first based upon the above assumption. Is however, such an assumption really justified? Lewis would refute the post-modern reductionist epistemology on two grounds.

- i) Firstly, Lewis would refute post-modern reductionism on the grounds of the physical and psychological structure of a human being. Simple observation would admit that the human body consists of inter-relating organs that fulfill very

specific and unique purposes. An eye, for example, exists specifically for the purpose of vision, an ear for the purpose of hearing sound. It cannot be denied that the human anatomy is made up of organs that specifically exist and work for very definite purposes. If on the level of physical organs, there is no serious objection to the concept of '*intended purpose*', then what objection may there be to considering the validity of the human mind itself as something in the same way that is '*intended*' as a *means* to communicate and inter-act with its pre-existing mould, the *Logos*? If each *part* of a human body contains suggestions of *purpose* and *intention*, then why deny the validity of the mind, which is, in the end, merely a synthesis of all of the bodily parts working together in harmony, and culminating in the self-consciousness that we call the *ego* (Witsius 1992:77). Lewis believed that the very structure of a human being made him/her a '*receiver*' and a '*transmitter*' of pre-existing *cosmos* (Pilgrim's Regress 1990:211). In his article entitled, *Behind the Scenes* (*Christian Reunion* 1990), Lewis compares human consciousness with his childhood experience of the theatre. His particular joy in going to the theatre, was to try and catch a glimpse of the goings on behind the scenes. His fascination with this, was the fact that

behind the presentation experienced on the stage before the audience, was *another world* of unseen props of cardboard and whitewash, as well as the hidden, but purposeful activity of the stage-hands and cue callers. Lewis enjoyed the thought that all the unseen activity and structure that existed at the same time as the performance behind the scenes, was in reality, all for one single harmonised purpose and goal - to present the play for the entertainment of the audience. All the unseen structure and activity existed especially for the play to be enjoyed by the audience. He writes (1990:99),

Is not our pleasure (even I take some) in Depth Psychology one instance of this pleasure in the contrast between 'behind the scenes' and 'onstage'? I begin to wonder whether that theatrical antithesis moves us because it is a ready-made symbol of something universal. All sorts of things are, in fact, doing just what the actor does when he comes through the wings. Photons of waves (whatever it is) come towards us from the sun through space. They are in a scientific sense, 'light'. But as they enter the air they become 'light' in a different sense: what ordinary people call *sunlight* or *day*, the bubble of blue or grey or greenish, luminosity in which we walk about and see. Day is thus a kind of stage set. Other waves (this time, of air) reach my eardrum and travel up a nerve and tickle my brain: all this is behind the scenes; as soundless as the whitewashed passages are undramatic. Then somehow (I've never seen it explained), they

step on to the stage (no one can tell me where this stage is), and become, say, a friend's voice or the *Ninth Symphony*.

The human consciousness to Lewis, is the *grand culmination*, the synthesised purpose - *the event on the stage*. Human consciousness therefore, is to Lewis, an intended *receiver* and *reflector* of pre-cognitive reality - and it is from this assumption that he draws his conclusions regarding a universal objectivity in human thinking.

- ii) Post-modernism recognises no epistemological distinction whatsoever between human consciousness and the environment in which the individual has been born, is sustained and daily functions. Pioneering post-modern physicist P. C. W. Davies writes (Griffin 1988:6),

The notion that time flows in a one-way fashion is a property of our consciousness. It is a subjective phenomenon and is a property that simply cannot be demonstrated in the natural world. This is an incontrovertible lesson from modern science...A flowing time belongs to our mind, not to nature.

There is to this mindset, only one observable reality, and that is human experience (Habermas 1987:294). The environmental context is only recognised in so far as it is something basically contextual to this human experience.

Both the object *perceived*, as well as the *signification ascribed to it*, are *locked up* in the same single experience of human consciousness (Derrida 1974:15). Anything outside of human experience may be considered to be '*real*', but nonetheless, '*inconceivable*' - and therefore irrelevant to practical philosophy. Because of Lewis' epistemological dualism however, he was able to intelligently consider reality *outside* of direct human experience as well as conscious experience *per se*. This obviously explains why he refused to accept the *noumenal barrier* to metaphysical knowledge that had been set up by Kant. Lewis draws a clear line of distinction between an object and the signification that is humanly ascribed to it and makes no apology for doing so. In his 1947 work entitled, *Miracles*, he clearly draws this line (1990:77), 'Thought is distinct from the imagination which accompanies it. Also thought may be in the main, sound - even when the false images that accompany it are mistaken by the thinker for true ones.' This is a very important point. Whereas post-modern epistemology binds the *signifier*, the *signified*, and the *signification* together and regards them as inseparably bound together within the same single conscious experience, Lewis makes an epistemological distinction between *thought* and *imagination*. He proves that such a

distinction exists by apt demonstration. In a paper entitled, “Is Theology Poetry?” (*Screwtape Proposes a Toast* 1977:52), Lewis writes,

The first person of the Trinity is not the Father of the Second in a physical sense. The Second Person did not come ‘down’ to earth in the same sense as a parachutist: nor re-ascend into the sky like a balloon: nor did he literally sit at the right hand of the Father. Why then, does Christianity talk as if all these things did happen? The agnostic thinks that it does so because those who founded it were quite naively ignorant and believed all these statements literally; and we later Christians have gone on using the same language through timidity and conservatism.

Here we note that words are used to express the Christian faith that seem at very least, crudely anthropomorphic. Did Jesus ‘*come down*’ to earth? Is He now, ‘*ascended*’, and at the ‘*right hand*’ of His ‘*Father*’? Lewis continues (1977:52),

What did the early Christians believe? Did they believe that God really had a material place in the sky and that He received His Son in a decorated state chair placed a little to the right of His own - or did they not? The answer is that the alternative we are offering them was probably never present to their minds at all. As soon as it was present, we know which side of the fence they came down. As soon as the issue of Anthropomorphism was explicitly before the Church in, I think, the second century, Anthropomorphism was condemned. The Church knew the answer (that God had no body and therefore couldn’t sit in a

chair) as soon as it knew the question. But till the question was raised, of course, people believed neither the one nor the other.

In an article entitled, “Horrid Red Things” (*First and Second Things* 1985:37), he writes,

In the same way, an early peasant Christian might have thought that Christ’s sitting at the right hand of the Father, really implied two chairs of state, in a certain spatial relation, inside a sky palace. But if the same man afterwards received a philosophical education and discovered that God has no body, parts, or passions, and therefore neither a right hand nor a palace, he would not have felt that the essentials of his belief had been altered. What had mattered to him, even in the days of his simplicity, had not been supposed details about celestial furniture. It had been the assurance that the once crucified Master was now the supreme Agent of the unimaginable Power on whom the whole universe depends. And he would recognise that in this, he had never been deceived.

What Lewis is pointing out here may be expressed in post-modern terminology. The *significance* that early Christians *signifiers* ascribed to the *kerugma* that was being *signified*, was not something inseparably interwoven, as post-modernists would claim. To prove his point Lewis provides us with this prime example. I shall coin this, *semantic compensation*. The words, ‘*descended, ascended, Father,*

Son, Throne, were utilised as *symbolic aids* in the construction of a *scaffolding of conception*, which enabled the early Christians to comprehend the incomprehensible supernatural reality that lay behind the words, by means of transposition (see chapter four, part one of this dissertation). The moment one considers the idea of semantic compensation however; one is forced to acknowledge the possibility of (not one but) two essential strands running within a human's thinking. One being the *conception* of a reality that is perceived and acknowledged - the latter strand being the compensating significance that is ascribed to it, which serves as an aid to a better comprehension of the former. Lewis writes (*Screwtape Proposes a Toast* 1977:53),

My mental picture of an Oxford college, before I saw one, was very different from the reality in physical details. But this did not mean that when I came to Oxford I found my general conception of what a college means to have been a delusion. The physical pictures had inevitably accompanied my thinking, but they had never been what I was chiefly interested in, and much of my thinking had been correct in spite of them. What you think is one thing, what you imagine while you are thinking is another.

The earliest Christians were not so much like a man who mistakes the shell for the kernel as like a man who is carrying a nut that hasn't yet cracked. The moment it is cracked, he knows which part to throw away. Till then he holds on to the nut: not because he is a fool, but because he isn't.

This Lewisian distinction in thought between, *thought* (proper) and *imagination*, is an effective challenge to post-modern epistemological reductionism. Using his metaphor of a nut and its shell, we can construct an illustration that may grant substance to this premise. We can imagine for this purpose, the following.

An Amazonian tribal shaman may describe what Western doctors would refer to an epileptic fit, as being a demonic oppression. He may consider its causation as being due to an evil curse that has been inflicted upon the victim due to some broken taboo. This, Lewis would term the *imaginative - the shell* of semantics. Behind the shaman's terminology however, would be the understanding that his own particular conception of his patient's condition, as well as the condition's causation is open to constant re-assessment and re-definition. If the shaman for example, later discovered that his patient had recently been hit over the head, then he would change his diagnosis to incorporate this new discovery. If, to take the proposition one step further, the shaman discovered modern medicine, and made a decision to accept its proposals, his very terminology would change. What would *not change*, however, would be his knowledge

of the objective fact that he had a troubled patient, and that the patient's condition was due to some causation. Here we should realise the point that Lewis is making concerning semantics and thought. The condition of the shaman's patient and its causation (*the thought proper - the nut*) will remain constant and objective, while the shaman's interpretation thereof (*the imaginative - the shell*), will adapt and change as knowledge thereof increases.

Lewis' own example of the early Christians is a very good illustration of this point. The first century Italian peasant, as *signifier*, may well have assigned a very crude and naive anthropomorphic *signification* to his/her theological conceptions, *the signified*, but these conceptions would constantly adapt and re-adjust to newly acquired data. This adapting of semantics to newly acquired information strongly suggests that the mind intuitively recognises an objectivity that exists *outside of* immediate experience (i.e. *the nut*), and compensates for its incomplete knowledge by means of imaginative imagery (i.e. *the shell*).

Lewis' distinction between thought (proper) and imagination is helpful in explaining the adaptability of human

conceptions. A major problem that challenges post-modern epistemology on this point, is this: why, if human consciousness is confined to the closed system of its own linguistic pool, should any semantic adaptation to circumstances and environment occur at all? Is language really something inescapable, or does consciousness recognise (even a fraction of) some objectivity? Lewis writes (*Miracles* 1990:106); ‘Experience therefore cannot prove uniformity (or its changes), because uniformity has to be assumed before experience proves anything.’ Another Lewisian attack on the above epistemological scepticism of semantics is as follows: in an article entitled, “The Language of Religion”, Lewis writes (*Christian Reflections* 1991:177),

There seem to be people about to whom imagination means only the presence of mental images (not to mention those like professor Ryle who deny even that), to whom thought means only unuttered speech, and to whom emotions are final, as distinct from the things they are about. If this is so, and if they increase, then all real communications between them and the earlier type of man will finally be impossible.

Something like this may be happening. You remember Wells’ *Country of the Blind*. Now its inhabitants, being men, must have descended from ancestors who could see. During centuries, a gradual atrophy of sight must have spread through the whole race; but at no given moment till it was complete, would it (probably) have been equally advanced in all individuals. During

this intermediate period a very interesting linguistic situation would have arisen. They would have inherited from their un-blind ancestors all the visual vocabulary - the names of the colours, words like, 'see' and 'look' and 'dark' and 'light'. There would be some who still used them in the same sense as ourselves: archaic types who saw the green grass and perceived the light coming at dawn. There would be others who had faint vestiges of sight, and who used these words with increasing vagueness, to describe sensations so evanescent as to be incapable of clear discrimination. (The moment at which they begin to think of them as sensations in their own eyeballs, not as externals, would mark an important step). And there would be a third class who had achieved full blindness, to whom see was merely a synonym for *understand*, and *dark* for *difficult*. And these would be the vanguard, and the future would be with them, and a very little cross-examination of the archaic type that still saw would convince them that its attempt to give some other meaning to the old visual words was merely a tissue of vague, emotive uses and category mistakes.

Not only does Lewisian thought resist the post-modern epistemological imposed limitation of *semantics*, but also it denies their '*prison of syntax*'. Leffel writes (McCallum 1996:39), 'Since the logic of one language (syntax) cannot be applied to the logic (syntax) of another, we are confronted with separate, culturally isolated systems of thinking.' Lewis developed a novel approach as to understanding how

anything metaphysical could be accommodated to human conception. He termed this approach, *Transposition*. Lewis describes this as the following (*Screwtape Proposes a Toast* 1977:84), 'Transposition occurs whenever the higher reproduces itself in the lower.' (For a full explanation of transposition, see chapter three of part two in this dissertation). Lewis' argument, using his concept of transposition, would go something like this - Post-modern epistemology denies the possibility of a linguistic paradigm having any objective conscious contact with anything outside of its own paradigm. Each linguistic paradigm is an air-tight *monad* from which there is no escape (McCallum 1996:38). This contention can be clearly refuted by a person who holds that a *bona fide* reality exists somehow outside of existential human consciousness, as well as an understanding of transposition. The following example may illuminate this point.

A transposition may be applied to a printed musical score that was originally intended to be played by a string quartet. By means of transposition, the score may be used to be played on the piano. This will mean that the musical notes printed originally for four string instruments, will now be read

instead as notes for the piano and played as such. This transposition will entail the compensation of piano keys and chords in the place of violin and cello harmonies etc. The question may be asked, 'is there a relationship between the original score for a string quartet and the transposition for the piano?' The answer must obviously be, 'yes.' But the *signs* and the *significations* read on the score (the syntax), are interpreted radically different for say, a cello player than a pianist. The cellist sees the score in terms of finger positions on his fret-board, whereas the pianist sees the score in terms of ebony and ivory keys. The answer is that, as long as the existence of the original intended use of the score is unknown, the transposition, as well as the obvious relationship existing between cellist and pianist, will be inconceivable. The illustration can be taken further. The same score originally written for a string quartet may be played not only on the piano, but also on the Welsh harp, the Indian sitar, the Australian *dijeri-du*. In the light of this illustration, post-modern epistemology can only justify its reductionist position on the *monad* of syntax because it will not recognise any reality *outside* of, or *beyond* subjective consciousness. With the epistemological acceptance of there being even a *possible* observable reality existing

beyond human experience, transposition is able to account for how linguistic paradigms are able to comprehend and communicate with each other and beyond, without any epistemological absurdity at all.

3.5.3 The Post-modern Epistemological Argument
Syllogistically Summarised

PREMISE ONE: Semantics is the structure of meaning for all human self-consciousness.

PREMISE TWO: Syntax regulates and directs the character and pattern of all human thinking.

CONCLUSION: Human self-consciousness is imprisoned behind *'the iron curtain'* of semantics and syntax.

3.5.4 The Epistemological Answer of C. S. Lewis
Syllogistically Summarised

PREMISE ONE: The human mind is capable of adjusting its semantics to conform with any new information imposed upon it.

PREMISE TWO: If any communicating reality outside of human self-consciousness did (even hypothetically) exist, it could be humanly comprehended by means of transposition.

CONCLUSION: Semantics and syntax do not necessarily enclose human self-consciousness in an inescapable *monad*

3.6 **IS RELIGIOUS DOGMATISM SOMETHING INTER-CULTURALLY TABOO?**

'The technocrats declare that they cannot trust what society designates as its needs; they 'know' that society cannot know its own needs since they are not variables independent of the new technologies. Such is the arrogance of the decision makers - and their blindness.' Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Post-Modern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1984:65).

'The other aspect of narrative selfhood is correlative: I am not only accountable, I am one who can always ask others for an account, who can put others to the question. I am part of their story as they are part of mine. The narrative of any one life is part of an interlocking set of narratives.' Alasdair Macintyre, *The Conception of a Tradition* (1984:204).

'For the pragmatist, by contrast, 'knowledge' is, like 'truth', simply a compliment paid to the beliefs which we think so well justified that, for the moment, further justification is not needed. An enquiry into the nature of knowledge can, on his view, only be a socio-historical account of how

various people have tried to reach agreement on what to believe.' Richard Rorty, *Solidarity or Objectivity?* (1991:26).

Dennis McCallum describes in his work entitled, *The Death of Truth*, the scope of the following section (1996:201),

Post-modernists argue that those they label fundamentalists are unacceptable because they subscribe to universal truth claims, what post-modern thinkers call *metanarratives*. Metanarratives are over-arching explanations of reality based on central organising 'truths'. Those who believe in universal explanations for reality are considered to be *totalistic* or *logocentric* in their thinking. Instead post-modernists believe each group tells its own story or narrative, their own understanding of reality - understandings that others should never discount, exclude or marginalise. *Totalistic* thinkers such as *fundamentalists* want their story to dominate all other stories.

The above statement needs to be understood in the light of the previous paragraphs in this section of the dissertation. If there is no human consciousness outside of linguistically systematised sentience, then religion is indeed something very difficult to define, let alone teach! Post-modern theologian Mark Taylor suggests, that due to the fluid and word-bound contextuality of the human mind, even the word, *God*, can be misleading. Taylor suggests a substitutive title for Divinity - *Thoth* - The Egyptian god of writing. As post-modern epistemology considers all human thought as analogous to a textual construction, where every word, space and punctuation on the page is context-dependant, and

meaningless outside of its context, the name *Thoth* as a substitute for the term, *God*, seems appropriate to Taylor. He writes (1984:116),

It is, of course, it is impossible to master *Thoth* by the logic of exclusion. In the liminal time-space of scripture, hard and fast oppositions are shattered and every stable either-or is perpetually dislocated. The divine milieu is neither fully present nor absent but is present only to the extent that it is at the same time absent. It neither is nor is not; it is insofar as it is not and is not insofar as it is. It is not totally positive nor completely negative but affirms in negating and negates in affirming...For this reason, the divine milieu is not thinkable within the terms of classical logic, but only within the graphics of *pharmakon*.

What Taylor means by *pharmakon* (a word derived from classical Greek, meaning drug, or medicine), he goes on in the same passage to describe as follows (1984:16), 'The *pharmakon* is the movement, the locus and the play the production of difference.' I take Taylor's statement on the ambiguity of religious thought as being representative of the epistemology at present under discussion. Because human thought to post-modern epistemology is always enclosed within an inescapable play on words, and can only reason as semantically instructed and channeled by the syntax, religion is, and can only ever be, something absolutely subjective in nature. It is because of this, that post-modernism stands in strong opposition to any form of religious fundamentalism. Hall writes (1991:59), 'Dogmatism, totalitarianism, and narrow intolerance are all directly connected with unjustified claims to final truth'. If each religious paradigm is culturally constructed, and each culture is equal to other cultures, then

no one religious construct should impose its own value system upon any other. Also, if each linguistic paradigm is an inescapable *monad*, then any attempt by one religion to win converts from other religious world-views, is not only considered imperialistic, but also impossible. McCallum writes (1996:203), 'Let's be clear. Post-modernists aren't against religion. They are only against religious teaching that holds to objective truth and the usefulness of reason. Religion based only on personal experience and 'what's true for me' is perfectly compatible with the post-modern worldview.'

The impact of the above position is now evident in many religious circles today. Inter-faith dialogue has recently become a fashionable topic in seminaries and minister fraternals. Arthur Song gives an apt description of this, and the dilemma that it poses to evangelical Christians (*The South African Baptist Journal of Theology* 2000:191),

As Christians we need to recognise that we are living in a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and therefore a multi-religious society. This is the reality. We can show tolerance and patience to those whose faiths differ from ours and thereby earn the privilege to address their deepest need for a personal saviour in Jesus Christ. Or we can display a superior religious attitude and 'thrust the gospel down the throats' of those to whom we wish to minister, not because we are unconcerned about their eternal welfare, but simply because we are insensitive to their own religious piety and sincerity.

The inter-faith dilemma is even more perplexing than Song suggests. 'How many Christian evangelists,' post-modern thinkers ask, 'truly realise the arrogance as well as the absurdity implicit in their efforts to win a convert from another religion?' It is held by this mind-set that a person inherits their religious values in the same way that they inherited their language - from their own particular culture (Giroux 1991:45). Post-modern antagonism towards any universal and objective categorical imperative, it would seem, has one single exception - namely their own particular position on this matter (McCallum 1996:201). A prime example of this may be illustrated in the ideological motivation behind post-modern educational theorist Henry Giroux. He writes (1991:49), 'Ethics must be seen as a central concern of critical pedagogy (i.e. post-modern education).' The immediate question that comes to mind is, '*whose* ethics? Or, ethics derived from *which* cultural paradigm? Post-modernist sociologist David Hall writes that we need to (1991:59), '...desire to see essential unity among cultures...' but on what does he base such a desire? On what grounds should it be agreed that his sentiment is considered as right? It is at this point that the thinking of C. S. Lewis may help in solving the dilemma.

3.6.1 C. S. Lewis and Religious Dogma

I believe that Lewis would tackle the above problem by firstly establishing his pre-supposed supernaturalist position. Lewis held

that evidence for supernatural reality could be rationally discerned in four major ways: in rationality itself, in the Categorical Imperative, in the universal lure of *sehnsucht*, and in the universality of religious awe (see part one of this dissertation). From his supernaturalist epistemological foundation, Lewis would argue that human self-consciousness tends to reflect the over-arching supernatural realm in a certain peculiar way - by means of *mythology* (Walker 1998:132). This term needs to be understood in a very specific way. Myth, to Lewis was not merely primitive explanation of natural phenomena, nor was it merely fabled history. Myth to Lewis is a *shadow, a reflection of universal reality* that falls on human consciousness in varying levels of fidelity. This is expressed in propositional and three-dimensional forms, usually in the form of narrative (Walker 1998:132). Traces of Lewis' four universals (see part one of this dissertation) are all to be found in varying degrees in every true myth (Walker 1998:140). Lewis explains the significance of myth as an aid to human comprehension of the metaphysical realm. He writes (God in the Dock 1990:42), 'In the enjoyment of a great myth, we come nearest to experiencing as a concrete what can otherwise only be understood as an abstraction.' In a paper entitled, "Religion Without Dogma?" (*Timeless at Heart* 1991:87), he writes,

I believe that in the huge mass of mythology which has come down to us a good many different sources are mixed - true history, allegory, ritual,

the human delight in story telling, etc. But among these sources, I include the supernatural, both diabolical and divine. We need here only concern ourselves with the latter. If my religion is erroneous then occurrences of similar motifs in pagan stories are, of course, instances of the same, or a similar, error. But if my religion is true, then these stories may well be a *preparatio evangelica*, divine hinting in poetic and ritual form at the same central truth which later focused and (so to speak) historicised in the incarnation.

It is this very understanding of myth that justifies for Lewis, his confidence in Christianity as the one true religion. In the same paper he continues (1991:88),

I could not believe in Christianity if I were forced to say that there were a thousand religions in the world in which 999 were pure nonsense and the thousandth fortunately true. My conversion, very largely, depended on recognising Christianity as the completion, the actualisation, the entelechy, of something that had never been wholly absent from the mind of man.

If we understand Lewis' use of the word myth - i.e. the vehicle instrumental in conveying universal reality to human consciousness by means of a transposition into narrative, then a possible solution to the above dilemma of religious dogmatism is presented to us. In an article entitled, "Christian Reunion" (*Christian Reunion and other Essays* 1990:20), Lewis writes,

It is important at this point that I should not be misunderstood. What I am trying to say might be interpreted to mean that doctrines 'don't matter', and that the essence of the spiritual life lay either in the affections or in some 'mystical' experience to which the intelligence is simply irrelevant. I do not believe it is so. That the spiritual life transcends both intelligence and morality, we are probably all agreed. But I suppose it transcends them as poetry transcends grammar, and does not merely exclude them as algebra excludes grammar. I should distrust a mysticism to which they ever became simply irrelevant...To the very last, when two people differ in doctrine, logic proclaims that though both might be in error, it is impossible for both to be right. And error always to some extent disables.

The illustration of transposition that I have previously used in this section, may help to demonstrate the significance that Lewis' concept of myth can have in the above debate. In order for a score written for a string quartet to be played on the piano, a transposition is required. The notation printed on the page will be accommodated to the piano keys. Rather than four string instruments, only one piano is used. Chords will compensate for the harmonising of different string instruments. The musician who knows the original score as being intended for a string quartet will immediately be able to recognise the transposition that has taken place when it is heard on the piano. Here is the point - the transposition may effect the *quality* of the music. It is, once transposed, now a *solo* piece where it was originally a *quartet*, it now has a different, *tone* and *pitch* - the

transposition has in other words, made the score sound *qualitatively* different. This does not mean however, that the score itself is *essentially* different at all. The very same melodies and harmonies are played in both the original string quartet as well as the transposed piano solo - only now the piano is compensating for the lack of the four wind instruments. A Beethoven lover would immediately recognise that it is his *12th string quartet* that is being played, even if it were played on a piano. This is always the case in transposition. If it were *not* the case, if even a slightly *essential* difference were noted, for example a different melody or harmony was played, then it could not be considered that a transposition had taken place at all, the different melody and harmony would be considered a completely different score. In transposition, the *higher, more complex*, that is filtered down to the *lower, less complex*, will always, due to compensating accommodation, imply a *qualitative* difference between the higher and the lower, but never an *essential* difference. The lower will always correspond in degree, with the higher.

Perhaps another analogy will strengthen this point that I am making. In order to explain the visual wonder of a sunset to a person born blind, a transposition would be absolutely necessary. Visual imagery would have to be somehow expressed by appealing

to the blind person's remaining four senses. Touch, smell, sound and taste, would have to *compensate* for the blind person's inability to actually see the splendid sunset. One would have to say things like, 'the sunset *feels* like...' or '*sounds* like...' Thus far I am sure, transposition in this particular case is understood. If however, my description of a sunset by using the compensatory aid of touch, sound, taste, and smell, led the blind person to not perceive of a sunset at all, but rather my descriptions led him/her to perceive a chicken-run, then transposition could never have truly occurred. Transposition will always reflect back accurately to, and correspond with, its higher reality - otherwise it is not transposition at all.

Lewis considered, with transposition in mind, myth to be the *lower form* expression of ultimate reality. Ultimate reality in other words, is transposed into myth. In the light of this, it may now be better understood why Lewis considered some myths to be closer to the truth than others, and why he considered Christianity to be the ultimate myth of all (*Timeless at Heart* 1991:87). In a paper written in 1963 to explain his own objection towards the ordination of women priests, Lewis effectively connects myth as transposition and religious dogma. He writes (*God in the Dock* 1990:90),

To us a priest is primarily a representative, a double representative, who represents us to God and God to us. Our very eyes teach us this in church. Sometimes the priest turns his back on us and faces the east - he speaks to God for us: sometimes he faces us and speaks to us for

God. We have no objection to a woman doing the first: the whole difficulty is about the second. But why? Why should a woman in this sense represent God?...The sense in which she cannot represent God will perhaps be plainer if we look at it the other way round. Suppose the reformer stops saying that a good woman may be like God and begins saying that God is like a good woman? Suppose he says that we might just as well pray to 'Our Mother which art in Heaven' as to 'Our Father'. Suppose he suggests that the Incarnation might just as well have taken a female as a male form, and the Second Person of the Trinity be as well called the Daughter as the Son. Suppose finally that the mystical marriage were reversed, that the Church were the Bridegroom and Christ the Bride. All this it seems to me is involved in the claim that a woman can represent God as a priest does.

The question may be asked by the reader, 'why should a woman not stand in such a position in the Church? Why should gender roles enter into the Christian teaching at all? The answer that Lewis supplies, an answer that is able to throw light not only upon his immediate question on women priests, but also the post-modern challenge to religious dogma. He writes (1990:91),

But Christians think that God Himself has taught us how to speak of Him. To say that it does not matter is to say that either all masculine imagery is not inspired, is merely human in origin, or else that, though inspired, it is quite arbitrary and unessential, and this is surely intolerable. It is also surely based on a shallow view of imagery. Without drawing upon religion, we know from our poetical experience that image and apprehension cleave closer together than common sense is here prepared to admit; that a child that has been taught to pray to a Mother in Heaven would have a religious life radically different from that of a

Christian child. And as image and apprehension are in organic unity, so, for a Christian, are human body and human soul.

With the Lewisian concept of transposition in mind, let us consider the implications of what Lewis is saying above; let us consider two related examples. Firstly, it has already been confirmed that a pianist playing a score originally intended for a string quartet still faithfully reproduces its intended *essence* though playing it on a piano - only the *quality* of the score would be changed. Supposing however, a pianist opted to alter a significant number of notes that were printed on the score, and play it as improvised - it would not then still be considered as *essentially* the same score.

Secondly, if a blind person heard a description of a sunset that adequately compensated visual images for smell, touch, sound and taste, one could then consider the blind person's perception of the actual sunset as being accurate to vision in *essence*. If however, visual perception of a sunset was communicated to the blind person's remaining four senses in an inarticulate way, the very word, 'sunset' would have no essential accuracy to the visual reality.

In both of the cases above, it has to be agreed that a faithful and accurate correspondence between the *lower* to the *higher essence*,

is vital for any conception to qualify for the designation, *transposition*. We may also note here that in transposition, the *lower level* is expected to maintain a corresponding fidelity to the *higher level* even though at the lower level, the *higher* may be inconceivable. We can now proceed to consider Lewis' argument in the above passage. May a hypothetical religious reformer, in the light of transposition, substitute a female deity for the Male portrayed in Christian imagery and yet remain true to the essential higher reality transposed? Lewis writes (*God in the Dock* 1990:94),

We cannot shuffle or tamper so much. With the Church, we are farther in: for there we are dealing with male and female not merely as facts of nature but as the live and awful shadows of realities utterly beyond our control and largely beyond our direct knowledge. Or rather, we are not dealing with them but (as we shall soon learn if we meddle) they are dealing with us.

Because Lewis held to a supernatural epistemology, transposition could be used to intelligently explain human conception of metaphysical reality via mythological expression. In the light of this the dogmatic nature of orthodox Christianity may be epistemologically justified as long as a supernatural is presupposed. The present epistemological debate therefore needs to be recognised as being based upon ontological presupposition.

3.7 IS ALL RELIGIOUS BELIEF EQUALLY VALID?

'In order to avoid unnecessary confusion, it is important to realise that in radical christology the Divine is forever embodied. The word is always already inscribed. Incarnation therefore, is not a once-and-for-all event, restricted to a specific time and place and limited to a particular individual.'

Mark Taylor, *Erring: A Post-modern A/theology* (1984:115).

'Critical pedagogy needs a language that allows for competing solidarities and political vocabularies that do not reduce the issues of power, justice, struggle and equality to a single script, a master narrative that suppresses the contingent, historical and the everyday as a serious object of study.'

Henry Giroux *Towards a Post-Modern Pedagogy* (1991:50).

'Willful modernist self-exclusion, the claim to stand outside, is only a delusion; the post-modernist insists that everything is included (within social reality), that nothing can achieve the autonomy or distance in which the modernists found their last defense against all-encompassing capitalism.' John McGowan, *Post-modernism and its critics* (1991:4).

The post-modern position on religion flows inevitably out of its epistemology. Human consciousness is held to be the product of linguistic paradigms - the values and truth convictions of an individual are

considered as merely being cultural constructs - each cultural paradigm contains within itself its own system of significance and legitimacy. Because of this position no religion is considered to be either true or false, such terminology does not come in to the issue at all. The purpose of religion to post-modern thinkers is totally pragmatic. Religion authenticates an individual's experience of life as well as solidifies, motivates, and morally directs the community. Because humanity is not, as other animals, motivated entirely by instinct, religion plays a vital part in the regulation of a human life. Religion has an innate power to unify and instill values that are necessary for the continuance of human survival (Shorto 1997:253). Post-modern innovators therefore, are certainly not against religion; it is their considered *abuse* of religion that this mind-set decries. A typical post-modern argument against any claim to a 'true' religion is illustrated by McCallum (1996:209),

People might have a religious experience with such a higher power, but one thing is discounted: the importance of propositional truth - statements of fact that can be confirmed or denied by reason and evidence. Or to put it differently, post-modern worshippers are like post-modern readers: They are the source of truth - because truth is true if they really believe it - not the discoverers of truth, which is true whether they realise it or not.

Religion is encouraged in post-modernism - religion however, that is based on *logocentric metanarratives* (often referred to by post-modernists as religious *fundamentalism*) is firmly rejected. Shorto writes, (1997:238), 'That's what the Church (i.e. *fundamentalist* Church) doesn't understand

(i.e. free thought) because the Church is in the control business. That's why the Church claims that it is the source of infallible authority. We've got a lock on God - if you want God, come to us.' Post-modernism always considers *logocentricity* as a power-play (Foucault 1980:132). Although it is obviously not the Christian faith alone that is facing this post-modern challenge (all religions are having to come to terms with its challenge) it is Christianity in particular, along with Islam (the two overtly proselytising religions), that stand to lose most of its doctrinal presupposition and content should it acquiesce in any way to post-modern epistemological claims. The question needs to be asked therefore, how can Christianity, especially of the evangelical variety, justify its position in the intellectual climate of our day? Is there a reasonable response to post-modern epistemology that can be offered?

C. S. Lewis is able to offer a reasonable defence in this matter. In order to introduce his answer to our present problem it will be necessary to firstly highlight to post-modern argument. This may be done in syllogistic tabature.

PREMISE ONE: Post-modern epistemology considers all human consciousness to be solely derived from sentient experience that is systematised within a particular linguistic paradigm (Cahoone 1996:15).

PREMISE TWO: Religion is entirely a product of human consciousness (Taylor 1984:6, Lyotard 1984:xxiv).

CONCLUSION: Religion is only as real and as valid as it results from, and conforms to, the cultural paradigm of a particular human consciousness.

If the first syllogism can be accepted as contextually sound, we can develop a more complex one:

PREMISE ONE: A religion is as real and as valid only in so far as it conforms to the cultural paradigm of a particular human being (Cahoone 1996:15).

PREMISE TWO: Any religious world-views and value systems that may exist *outside* of a particular cultural paradigm, are epistemologically inconceivable to a person *inside* (Macintyre 1984:206, Lyotard 1984:xxiii).

CONCLUSION: It is philosophically absurd, as well as morally improper, to attempt the proselytising of a member of a different cultural background into another religion (Giroux 1991:45).

If each cultural paradigm contains its own particular system of value and significance to the human experience, then no religion can ever be considered more *real* or *true* than any other. The post-modern consideration of comparative religion entails the acknowledgement that truth will always be, and can only ever be, a social and linguistic construct (McCallum 1996:34). Hinduism to a post-modernist, is certainly considered as being the *true* religion - but only insofar as it is being considered from within the Hindu cultural paradigm. The question, 'does

Islam work?' is always answered in the affirmative by a Muslim. The very idea of there being a religion that might be nearer to the *truth* than any other, is totally ruled out of court as being *logocentric totalism* by post-modern epistemology. Polytheism *is* the true religion for polytheists - pantheism *is* the true religion for pantheists - atheism *is* truth and reality for those who are atheists. David Hall writes (1991:65),

Allusiveness requires vague boundaries of self and world. The most desirable circumstance is one in which images, as richly vague complexes capable of a variety of evocations, are communally fixed and protected as images...In any case, there is nothing behind the language in the form of structure or logos to which appeal may be made to establish the presence of objective truth. Meanings derive from the allusive play of differences among the words and images of the language.

The above challenge to orthodox Christian objectivity in truth needs to be effectively answered in a rational way. But can it? Lewis, I believe, would answer the claim that no religious knowledge is objectively measurable by relating ideology to *praxis* - in other words, by pointing out the obvious relationship that exists between what a person believes, and how a person acts. In an article entitled, "Man or Rabbit?" (*God in the Dock* 1990:68), Lewis writes,

If Christianity should happen to be true, then it is quite impossible that those who know this truth, and those who don't should be equally well equipped for leading a good life. Knowledge of the facts must make a difference to one's actions. Suppose you found a man on the point of starvation and wanted to do the right thing. If you had no knowledge of medical science, you would probably give him

a large solid meal; and as a result, your man would die. That is what comes of working in the dark. In the same way, a Christian and a non-Christian may both wish to do good to their fellow men. The one believes that men are going to live forever, that they were created by God and so built that they can find their true and lasting happiness only in being united to God, that they have gone badly off the rails, and that obedience to Christ is the only way back. The other believes that men are an accidental result of the blind workings of matter, that they started as mere animals and have more or less steadily improved, that they are going to live for about seventy years, that their happiness is fully attainable by good social services and political organisations, and that everything else (e.g. vivisection, birth-control, the judicial system, education) is to be judged to be 'good' or 'bad' simply in so far as it helps or hinders that kind of 'happiness'.

What Lewis is arguing here is that it is actually impossible to divorce human behaviour from human thinking. There will always be a behavioural consequence to a held belief. Lewis illustrates this point by giving an example in the same article (1990:69),

Again, where the Materialist would simply ask about a proposed action, 'Will it increase the happiness of the majority?' the Christian might have to say, 'Even if it does increase the happiness of the majority, we can't do it. It is unjust.' And all the time, one great difference would run through their whole policy. To the Materialist, things like nations, classes, civilisations must be more important than individuals, because the individuals only live seventy odd years each and the group may last for centuries. But to the Christian, individuals are more important, for they live eternally; and races, civilisations and the like, are in comparison, the creatures of a day.

The Christian and the Materialist hold different beliefs about the universe. They can't both be right. The one who is wrong will act in a way which simply doesn't fit the real universe. Consequently, with the best will in the world, he will be helping his fellow creatures to their destruction.

In his article entitled, *Christian Reunion* (1990:21), he writes, 'To the very last, when two people differ on doctrine, logic proclaims that though both might be in error, it is impossible for both to be right. And error always to some extent disables'. Lewis' point may be more clearly realised if we use an extreme illustration out of our recent history in order to drive the argument home. We will start by defining the meaning of the word, *religion*. Religion is that phenomenon in human experience that involves three basic definitive characteristics (*Library of Modern Knowledge* 1979:694):

Firstly, a belief in a being, or cause, that is of more and superior significance than the individual (i.e. the Jewish Deity, *Yahweh*, the Hindu life-force, *Brahman*, the Chinese concept of *Tao*).

Secondly, a responsive and submissive behavioural pattern that is considered to be in optimum conformity to the pattern of the religion (i.e. an ethical code, behavioural code, a concept of *taboo*).

Thirdly, an *eschataolgical telos* - a goal that the religion's adherents are believed to be heading towards (i.e. The Buddhist conception of *Nirvarna*, the Christian *parousia*).

All religion will, in varying degrees, always involve the above three essential qualities.

Religion therefore, need not necessarily entail the worship and belief in a personal deity. The religion of Confucianism qualifies for the classification of religion as described in three points above, yet it contains in its teachings, no concept of personal deity at all (*Library of Modern Knowledge* 1979:711), Buddhism worships no personal deity (Lewis *Timeless at Heart* 1987:85). Religion need not be necessarily supernaturalistic. Hinduism for example, is pantheistic and considers existence as a monistic unit (*Library of Modern Knowledge* 1979:704).

In the light of this, it may be reasonably suggested that Maoist Communism was, in a very real sense, a *religion*. It held to the first point, in that it taught of the existence of a principle that was higher in significance, value, and priority, than the individual citizen - namely the State. It also contained the second quality of religion, an imposing behavioural pattern, a code of value and ethics. Thirdly, it cannot be denied that Maoist China motivated its citizens to strive passionately towards the eschatological goal of their ideology, a communist world society - a worker's *Utopia*. Maoist Communism could indeed be classified as a religion. The *little red book* containing the *Thoughts of Mao* was its scripture.

If however, we agree that Maoist communism qualifies for the title of religion, can we not also consider Nazi German ideology equally eligible for the same title? It is clearly evident from the records, that Nazi ideology considered the evolution of the *ubermensch* to be something transcending individual human worth and significance (*Time Life books* 1989:26), a prophetic leader inspired its ideology (i.e. Hitler), a behavioural code as well as a particular system of value was also imposed by the movement upon its citizens. Also, an eschatological goal was set, being the ideal world of Arian supermen (*Time life books* 1989:30). There can be little rational objection to the ideological Nazism of Hitler's Germany being termed a religion, as long as we use the qualifications for such a term as listed above. A crucial question in the light of this however, needs to be raised - If as it is claimed by post-modern epistemology, all religion is valid within its own cultural/linguistic paradigm, why should not the anti-Semitic, imperialistic, and warlike religion of Nazi ideology be granted the status of religious validity? Should not the Nazi value system be considered as being perfectly valid within what could be called the Nazi paradigm? The post-modern response to this question is that no religion may be tolerated that seeks to injure and dominate other, equally valid religious paradigms (Macintyre 1984:204). Religion that is tolerant and able to positively coexist with other religions for the good of society at large is, to post-modern epistemology, considered as valid religion. But here one cannot avoid noting an inconsistency. If all religions are closed within their own

particular cultural/linguistic monad, as contended by post-modern epistemology, then what can possibly be the factor that decides which particular religion is, and which is not, valid? In order for post-modernists to remain absolutely consistent to their epistemological convictions, no one value system (which is at best, merely the construct of a particular cultural/linguistic paradigm) should ever impose its own value system on any other unless such an imposition is admitted to be an entirely arbitrary affair. Most post-modernists would not wish to go so far as to admit to arbitrary moral definition, but it remains the only real option open to consistent and honest post-modern thinkers.

Lewis on the other hand can not be accused of any rational inconsistency in his argument for the conception of a universally true religion. Because of his supernaturalist epistemological foundation, he held to the reality of a categorical imperative that is experienced by all rational beings. This overarching human awareness of basic *right* and *wrong* could be utilised as a measure of the moral qualitative content of every human act and intention. Lewis writes (*Christian Reflections* 1991:94), 'Unless we take our own standards to be something more than ours, to be in fact, an objective principle to which we are responding, we cannot regard that standard as valid.' In his allegory, *The Pilgrim's Regress* (1990:74), Lewis describes the epistemological scepticism of his own day in terms of being a prison of

consciousness. He writes of the story's hero, John's encounter with the philosophical spirit of his age,

"Do you not know that all of this country belongs to the Spirit of the Age?"

'I am sorry,' said John, 'I didn't know. I have no wish to trespass, I will go round some other way. I will not go through his country at all.'

'You fool,' said the captain, 'You are in his country now. This pass is the way out of it, not the way into it. He welcomes strangers. His quarrel is with runaways.'

Then he called to one of his men and said, 'Here, Enlightenment, take this fugitive to our master'.

A young man stepped out and clapped fetters on John's hands: then putting the length of chain over his own shoulder and giving it a jerk, he began to walk down the valley dragging John after him.

The denial of objective reality was not, to Lewis, as many now consider it to be, an opportunity for religious freedom (Lyotard 1984:67), but a dungeon of epistemological pessimism and ultimately, of philosophical despair. But may his position be considered to be an adequate refutation of the above post-modern contention? The Lewisian argument in favour of the concept of the possibility of one objectively true religion, may now be fully brought forward. Syllogistic tabature will hopefully express the argument more clearly.

PREMISE ONE: It is, according to post-modern epistemology, both philosophically absurd, and morally wrong for one to attempt to proselytise a member from a particular cultural/linguistic paradigm out of that paradigm and into one's own.

PREMISE TWO: The particular notion of *philosophical absurdity*, as well as the particular notion of *moral wrongness*, according to post-modern epistemology, are both *themselves* merely constructs of a particular paradigm - namely their own.

CONCLUSION: Post-modern epistemology is not able to rationally denounce any *metanarrative* claim in the field of religion if it wishes to remain consistent with its own epistemological premises.

If the above syllogism is sound, we may now proceed to establish Lewis' supernaturalist epistemological argument in favour of what post-modernists would refer to as *religious metanarrative*.

PREMISE ONE: What a person believes (i.e. values, trusts, and fears) is directly related to how a person behaves, lives and dies (*God in the Dock* 1990:68).

PREMISE TWO: There are many belief systems that result in attitudes and behaviour patterns that are ultimately negative and sometimes counter-productive towards human survival (i.e. Nazi ideology) (*Abolition of Man* 1978:34).

CONCLUSION: Some belief systems (i.e. religions) must therefore be of less validity in the context of human survival than others.

One of the most obvious inconsistencies resulting from post-modern epistemology is its ideological motivation. As McCallum states (1996:48), a good many post-modern innovators consider their position as being a

necessary and timely world-view, that will hopefully prove beneficial to the challenge of twenty-first century global multi-culturalism. Post-modern educational theorist Henry Giroux writes (1991:55),

Such a position (i.e. post-modern epistemology) recognises that students have several or multiple identities, but also asserts the importance of offering students a language that allows them to reconstruct their moral and political energies in the service of creating a more just and equitable social order, one that undermines relations of hierarchy and domination.

The reason why he considers such a goal to be optimum, Giroux fails to mention, it certainly cannot be, according to his own epistemology because such an ideological goal is '*right*', '*best*', or '*true*'. Lewis' argument for the validity of a concept of objectively true religion, on the other hand, is based upon a consistent epistemological rationality. It is on his supernaturalist and rationalistic foundation that Lewis proceeded to argue for the historicity of the Christ event (*God in the Dock* 1990:56), the claims made by Christ recorded in the scripture (*Mere Christianity* 1989:52), and the psychological connection and anthropological relevance that exists between the *Kerugma* and human experience (*The Four Loves* 1977:127). The scope of this dissertation does not cover these, the most commonly scrutinised aspects of Lewisian apologetics. It is the present writer's strong conviction that the full impacting weight that is implicit behind the apologetical writings of C. S. Lewis will not be fully realised in the next

generation, unless the present post-modern epistemological challenge to Christian objectivity is seriously addressed.

3.8 A CASE STUDY

In order to demonstrate the relevance of Lewis' position in the light of our current epistemological debate with post-modernism, an application will now be made. In order to establish a reasonable academic credence to the claim of Lewis that human consciousness has an innate accessibility to a reality existing somehow exterior to, and wholly other than, observable natural phenomena, (by means of four basic experiences, namely rationality, categorical imperative, *sehnsucht*, religious awe), I offer the following case study:

If Lewis' epistemological contention is to be granted credibility, it will be necessary to, with reasonable support, supply satisfactory evidence that validates his epistemological claim that members of widely varying cultures, all equally reveal upon examination, the supposed Lewisian innate awareness of a supernatural reality. In other words, if Lewisian epistemology is to be granted even a provisional credence, and then it should be firstly established that a normal, self-conscious, human member of any particular culture should show definite signs that such a comprehension indeed occurs. Each *reason-endowed* individual,

regardless of cultural background, should be able to be seen to possess an awareness of the following:

- ◆ The possession of a rationality that Lewis would regard as being universal in its basic structure.
- ◆ The awareness of an innate sense of *right* and *wrong* behaviour and attitude that transcends a merely contextual ethics.
- ◆ A sense of profound mystery or awe, that tends to motivate a person into what might be termed as a *religious*, or *mystical* state of mind.
- ◆ A sense of longing for a significance that is profounder than mere social and physical well being.

In order to establish such a demonstration in a way that will prove adequate for the present task, I shall compare two radically different cultures by noting the way that they respectively correspond to the above Lewisian criteria. I shall compare certain traits of modern Western culture with the culture of ancient Mesopotamia. Hopefully, if these two cultures can show at least a small but real measure of commonality in the area under discussion, then it will help to establish the reasonable credibility of Lewis' epistemology.

3.8.1 Rationality: Western culture possesses a rationality upon which it bases its practices, values and explanations. Western thinking, it is universally agreed, is primarily based upon binary polarisations such as true and false, cause and effect, valid and invalid, living and inanimate. Western thinkers arrive at their conclusions by means of the utilisation of logical argumentation, inductive inference, and syllogistic deduction. These are considered part and parcel of Western culture. Westerners are epistemologically rational, it is very generally believed. Now I believe that Lewis would fully agree with such a statement - Westerners are indeed epistemologically rationally inclined - but Lewis would claim that the same must be said for every self-conscious individual irrespective of one's cultural background.

It may be argued in response to this, that our knowledge of ancient Mesopotamian culture could not possibly confirm this, as Mesopotamian civilisation was based upon primitive and mythological thought patterns which are quite foreign to the scientific thinking patterns of modern Western thinkers. Ancient Mesopotamians believed in things like, demons, lucky charms and evil curses, whereas today, we do not. But with a little serious consideration, one discovers something quite different from this superficial consideration. Although ancient Mesopotamian thought

used a radically different *symbolism* by which to express and exercise their thinking, the very same rational structure that supports modern Western thinking is clearly evident. Western cosmology for example, is on the surface, radically different from ancient Mesopotamian cosmology. Where many Westerners think of cosmology in terms of a *big bang*, chemical reactions, and expanding galaxies, Mesopotamian thinkers considered the cosmos to be due to a pre-cosmic battle that took place between the god *Marduk* and his rival goddess, *Tiamat*. The body of the slain *Tiamat* was, to Mesopotamian sages, the explanation that was given for the phenomenon called the universe.

Now, considering the Western cosmology in comparison with the ancient Mesopotamian, one might be tempted to consider the vast difference in terminology as being certain evidence for the absolute cultural divergence of its culture and our own. But upon closer consideration, one finds that the radical divergence occurs only in regard to the *symbolism of terminology* . The ‘*scaffolding*’ of rationality for both cultures, is exactly the same. Both cultures offer their cosmologies as an ‘*explanation*’ as to ‘*why*’ the universe exists, and ‘*how*’ it came about. Both cultures, in other words, are asking the same question, both are assuming the same *cause/effect* scenario, and both are equally assuming that

significance may be applied to phenomena by means of intelligible explanation. Both cultures therefore, upon closer inspection, employ the very same scaffolding of rationality - the vast divergence between the two cultures, is found merely in the *symbolism* that is employed to structure the rationality. Upon inspection therefore, it cannot be seriously denied that ancient Mesopotamians asked the same rationalistic questions as do contemporary Western scientists. Why? How? When? Where? Who?

3.8.2 Categorical Imperative: It has often been assumed that every culture possesses its own value system and set of norms by which it protects, regulates society, and motivates its members. Lewis, as has been discussed in the first part of this dissertation, argued that there exists only one, single, categorically imperative morality that is experienced in the same way by every self-conscious human being, in every culture without exception. This contention could possibly be resisted, by the antagonist, by pointing out the radically differing behavioural patterns that seem evident between our modern Western culture and that of ancient Mesopotamian society. Our culture, for example, frowns upon the imperial military domination of one nation over another, the ritual sacrificing of human beings, the harsh judgements imposed upon people who

have committed relatively insignificant crimes, the misuse of women, the torture of prisoners, etc. It could be argued that a culture that practiced the above atrocities must have lived under a radically different value system than our own. But is this really so? On closer examination, it will be noted that the peculiar behavioural patterns found in ancient Mesopotamian culture, were motivated primarily by their own particular cultural/linguistic comprehension of the very same morality that we know in our own culture today.

An example may help to illustrate my point: Whereas in Western culture, one would surely disapprove of the execution of a person accused of practicing sorcery. Western scruples about freedom of religion and the value of human life would guarantee such a resistance. Such scruples, however, were not the case in ancient Mesopotamia. The violent execution of people accused in ancient Mesopotamia of sorcery was frequent and widespread. The penalty for one practicing sorcery was usually a cruel and painful death. Does this however, suggest that ancient Mesopotamians were oblivious to the sense morality that we now enjoy? Not at all. The above divergence is entirely a matter of world-view - not a matter of morality. It needs to be remembered that the ancient Mesopotamian truly believed that sorcery was a very real and immanent *danger* to his life, family, and society. To this particular

mind-set, that perceived as the ultimate *good*, was to rid the world of such a threat as sorcery. Lewis writes (*Christian Reflections* 1991:105),

The method is to treat as differences in judgements of value what are really differences in belief about fact. The human sacrifice, or persecution of witches, are cited as evidence of a radically different morality. But the real difference lies elsewhere. We do not hunt witches because we disbelieve in their existence. We do not kill men to avert pestilence because we do not think that pestilence can be thus averted. We do 'sacrifice' men in war, and we do hunt spies and traitors.

The moral intention that motivated the Mesopotamian act of killing sorcerers was, in actual fact, comparable with the Western ideal to protect our family from disease by spraying insecticide and killing flies. Western culture does not approve of ritual human sacrifice, but that is simply because it does not believe that such a sacrifice would produce any ultimate good. Western culture does, very often condone human sacrifice when it comes to warfare. It is therefore, *perception* of reality that motivates both Western and ancient Mesopotamian culture, and not the categorical imperative. In both cultures ample evidence may be produced, that will convince the sceptic that both cultures praised faithfulness, honesty, and fairness, and frowned upon treachery, deception and injustice. An honest thinker has to finally admit that a single universal morality can be recognised in every culture, the cultural differences become

apparent primarily in the interpretation of contextualised experience of the categorical imperative. Lewis writes (*Christian Reflections* 1991:104),

If a man will go into a library and spend a few days with the *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* he will soon discover the massive unanimity of the practical reason in man. From the Babylonian *Hymn to Samos*, from the Laws of Manu, the *Book of the Dead*, the Analects, the Stoics, the Platonists, from Australian aborigines and Redskins, he will collect the same triumphantly monotonous denunciations of oppression, murder, treachery and falsehood. The same injunctions of kindness to the aged, the young and the weak, of almsgiving impartiality and honesty...There are of course, differences. There are even blindnesses in particular cultures - just as there are savages who cannot count up to twenty. But the pretence that we are presented with a mere chaos - that no outline of universally accepted value shows through - is simply false and should be contradicted in season and out of season wherever it is met.

3.8.3 Religious Awe: Is there a universal sense of mystical profundity in collective human consciousness? Lewis writes (the Problem of Pain 1990:15),

We do not know how far back in history this feeling goes. The earliest men almost certainly believed in things which would excite the feelings in us if we believed in them, and it seems therefore probable that numinous awe is as old as humanity itself. But our main concern is not with its dates. The important thing is that somehow or other it has come into existence, and is

widespread, and does not disappear from the mind with the growth of knowledge and civilisation.

It cannot be denied that such an experience may be evoked by any number of different sources. Where some may encounter a sense of profound awe and mystery by means of watching the stars, another may encounter the same experience when earnestly praying, or others, may be awed when under the influence of certain chemical stimulants. The question however, is not *how* such an experience may be caused, but *if* such an experience is indeed caused, is *universal*, and if it can be recognised as such?

If we compare the radically different cultures of our own Western *ethos* with the ancient Mesopotamian culture on this issue, it should become evident that both cultures show that such an experience of the numinous indeed occurs. Both modern Western, as well as ancient Mesopotamian literature, continuously refer in many different ways, to the fact that the religious instinct is a universal and compelling reality (although this instinct might be manifested in any number of different ways, it is still evident as an identifiable reality). The abundance of differing religious and metaphysical teachings and religious communities within our

contemporary Western society should be sufficient confirmation to us that human consciousness in our own culture is (however bleakly), aware of a reality somehow of greater significance than the individual's own mere phenomenal experience of life. Archaeological evidence reveals that Mesopotamian culture also, was saturated in a sense of the noumenal experience. Temples, priesthoods, mythologies, sacrificial systems, all confirm this fact.

3.8.4 The Lure of *Sehnsucht*: Is there a universal sense of desire in the human consciousness that longs for something other than immediate psychological and physical gratification? Such an inner drive may be pointed out as clearly evident in our own Western culture in a number of different ways: Our art, music, and literature convincingly confirm the existence of *sehnsucht* in our society. The psychological evidence of our human urge for significance and actualisation, the historical and biographical evidence which reveals again and again, generations striving after some particular object that it is hoped will authenticate and justify one's existence. *Sehnsucht* may not be so easily dismissed as to its being a widely experienced reality in our Western culture - but was it equally a reality in ancient Mesopotamia? Perhaps the now

well-known ancient Sumerian, *Epic of Gilgamesh*, written some four thousand years ago, will help answer that question. (*Library of Modern Knowledge* 1979:74),

Gilgamesh set out in search of the secret of immortality. He surmounted many obstacles, and at the furthest extremities of the universe he sought the advice of the only man who had obtained immortality - Utnapishtim. The latter tried to persuade Gilgamesh, maintaining that immortality was a life of boredom. But Utnapishtim's wife enables Gilgamesh to obtain the plant of rejuvenation - which was immediately stolen by a serpent. The quest was hopeless, and Gilgamesh resigned himself to a mortal state.

It may be seen in the above four paragraphs, that it is indeed possible for one to gather evidence in support of Lewis' argument that human consciousness possesses an innate awareness of a supernatural reality, and that this innate consciousness is something that is universally experienced. It is something experienced regardless of the particular cultural programming that one has received. It can be argued that cultures are indeed, primarily distinct from one another due to linguistics, and grounds of differing symbolism. The particular *significance* ascribed to an experience, in other words, will naturally differ from culture to culture - but the *experience* of phenomenon *per se*, is

always a constant. I have, in this case study, attempted to make this point more clearly evident, by comparing two radically different cultural paradigms, and showing how there is sufficient evidence of the four Lewisian human contacts with supernatural reality to reasonably support Lewis' case.

In order to summarise and justify the present case study, I will employ a Socratic dialogue.

Question: How does C. S. Lewis philosophically justify his opposition to epistemological reductionism in any shape or form?

Answer: He holds to an epistemology that is grounded on the assumption of an innate human consciousness of supernatural.

Question: Can Lewis' supernatural epistemology be reasonably validated?

Answer: Yes. Lewis appeals to four possible indications within human experience that suggest a supernatural reality. These are rationality, the categorical imperative, the universal lure of *sehnsucht*, and the universality of numinous awe.

Question: But are not such concepts as these merely constructs of a particular Western cultural paradigm?

Answer: Not at all. Even a casual perusal of the relevant humanities will reveal the fact that all cultures appear to experience, or to have experienced these above four concepts.

Question: What does a universal innate awareness of the supernatural prove anyway?

Answer: It stands in favour of the argument that the phenomenon of human consciousness need not be reduced to mere culture and linguistics. Such an epistemology will inevitably undermine all human aspiration for transcendence, and confine the human mind to the confines of an existential absolutism.

Question: Why does Lewis contend so fervently against such an epistemology?

Answer: Because true Christian apologetics will be utterly paralysed unless such epistemologies are refuted or at very least, undermined.