# MODERN AND POSTMODERN APPROACHES TO THE FREE WILL/DETERMINISM DILEMMA IN PSYCHOTHERAPY

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## Summary

Although modernists in psychology have attempted to cast the free will/determinism dilemma as either settled or irrelevant, it continues to enfeeble theory, therapy, and practice. The primary reason for this continuing enfeeblement is the modern dualistic framework for this dilemma: Either the will (choices, decisions, motives) is dependent on antecedent conditions and thus is determined or the will is independent of antecedent conditions and thus is free. This framework, however, is not supported by current research and practical experience, indicating that the will is inextricably connected to the past but is not determined by it. A postmodern framework for this

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issue, which resolves the free will/determinism dilemma (at least on this point) and is consonant with research findings and therapeutic practice, is outlined. A therapy case is described to illustrate this modern dilemma and its postmodern resolution.

The postmodern intellectual movement is supposedly upon us (Bevan, 1991; Dollahite, Slife, & Hawkins, 1997; Lyotard, 1992; Toulmin, 1982). Although modernism is still thought to occupy much of mainstream psychology and psychotherapy (Polkinghorne, 1983, 1990; Slife & Williams, 1995, 1997), postmodernism is hailed increasingly as a "way of knowing" for all psychologists to consider (e.g., Faulconer & Williams, 1990; Gilgun, Daly, & Handel, 1992; Harman, 1993, 1995; Messer, Sass, & Woolfolk, 1988; Patton, 1990; Richards & Bergin, 1997; Slife, 1998; Woolfolk, 1998). Unfortunately, postmodernism contains an extraordinarily diverse group of scholars, so any attempt to capture it is perilous, at best. Still, as others have noted (Bevan, 1991; Faulconer & Williams, 1990; Messer et al., 1988; Slife, in press; Slife & Williams, 1995), postmodernism does show discernible themes.

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

Postmodernists, however, have shown that this method is itself "theory-laden," beset with frequently unexamined philosophical assumptions (cf. Slife & Gantt, in press; Slife, Reber, & Gantt, in press). This has led to the realization that many of the age-old "cosmological questions" will not be answered through science (Slife & Williams, 1997). Moreover, postmodernists have demonstrated that these questions have not become irrelevant, as many modernists would have hoped. Problematic issues, such as free will/determinism, mind/body, atomism/holism, and theory/practice, continue to plague the construction of theories and the formulation of therapies (cf. Rychlak, 1988; Slife & Williams, 1995, 1997).

Postmodernism has not stopped with the mere exposure (or deconstruction) of these problematic issues. As Bevan (1991) notes, postmodernism attempts to "put back together the whole that analytical [modernist] science, over the past 300 years, has rent asunder" (p. 481). In other words, the various conceptual dualisms that have befuddled theoretically oriented psychologists for more than a century—for example, free will/determinism, mind/body, theory/practice—are themselves a product of the modernist penchant for analyzing issues into separate "factors." Such analytic separations have frequently been helpful, to be sure, but they are also problematic because the separated factors have to be ultimately reconnected. How, for example, do the mind and body interact? How do theory and practice relate to each other? How can free will and determinism make meaningful contact with one another? Modernism has "rent asunder" these relationships, to use Bevan's (1991) phrase, but modernism has so far failed to put them back together adequately.

Part of the postmodern agenda in psychology is to understand the person in ways that obviate the need for such separations. This article attempts to address the issue of free will and determinism in this postmodern spirit. Although modernists tend to cast this issue as either irrelevant or settled, we show how the issue continues to enfeeble theory, science, and practice. The main reason for this enfeeblement is that modernism has rendered the issue an either/or dichotomy—either a person is free or a person is determined. The practical limitations of this dichotomy are illustrated in a therapy case. The postmodern tradition[1] of Martin Heidegger (1926/1962) and Hans-Georg Gadamer (1993) is then used to shift the ground of the discussion to a conception that does not separate the psychological factors associated with free will and determinism in the first place. We show how this postmodern framework helps overcome the limitations associated with the modernist view of the therapy case.

## THE MODERNIST RENDERING

The free will/determinism issue is renowned for its pivotal historical role in the formulation of various personality theories and thus psychotherapies (see Rychlak, 1979, 1981). Nevertheless, the development of modernist methods of science has seemed to usurp

this role in psychology's more recent past. Because methods are assumed to be the pathway to objective truth, any questions that could not be framed methodologically were viewed as either settled or irrelevant. For example, one prominent modernist approach to "settling" the issue has been to assume that scientific method itself requires determinism (e.g., Heiman, 1995). However, this approach to the free will/determinism issue overlooks the philosophical bias that is inherent in such requirements (Slife, 1998; Slife & Gantt, in press). It also overlooks the many methods that do not require deterministic assumptions, including qualitative methods such as grounded theory and phenomenological analysis (e.g., Crabtree & Miller, 1992; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Gilgun et al., 1992; Patton, 1990; Strauss & Corbin, 1997; van Zuuren, Wertz, & Mook, 1987).

Another modernist tack is an insistence—via positivism—that theoretical issues such as free will and determinism are no longer, or never were, relevant to psychological science and practice. This, again, is the notion that science will guide us, without the need of theorists and philosophers. The problem is that this scientific guide is itself a philosophical argument about how theories are to be adjudicated (Slife & Gantt, in press; Slife & Williams, 1995, 1997). That is, there is no empirical evidence for empirical evidence. As Slife and Williams (1997) note, there is a "bootstrap" problem in a method that uses itself to validate its own methods.[2] Indeed, the only means of examining these methods in any ultimate sense is through philosophical or theoretical analysis. Consequently, any "scientific" assertion of the irrelevancy of certain theoretical or philosophical issues, such as free will and determinism, is itself part of a philosophy. In other words, this type of assertion can correctly be viewed as bias, philosophical fiat in the guise of method.

Furthermore, the free will/determinism issue is clearly not irrelevant to practice. Therapists trained in modernist ways of thinking may have learned to dismiss the issue as already settled or basically irrelevant (as above). However, there can be no doubt about its relevance to both client change and therapeutic technique. If, for example, people are completely determined, then client-generated and client-initiated therapy strategies are difficult, if not impossible, to conceptualize and implement. If, on the other hand, a free will were to exist, it could play a pivotal role in therapeutic change. Although few clients could simply "will" their way to mental health, a free will could aid or spite certain therapeutic interventions.

In this sense, the existence of a free will would call for a host of techniques to "facilitate" this will. These techniques would presumably differ from those based on the determinism of the person. For instance, if clients are determined by their biochemistry and/or their environment, then the direct manipulation of these factors would seem the most effective intervention. Indeed, a variation of the free will/determinism issue underlies the "prescription privilege" controversy. If neurochemistry determines behaviors and emotions, then therapists would need access to the drugs required to alter this neurochemistry. If, on the other hand, clients possess some free will, then prescription privileges might be less necessary. The point is that the free will/determinism issue is neither settled nor irrelevant.

## THE MODERNIST PROBLEM

Although the significance of this free will/determinism problem is clear for a host of different theoretical and therapeutic issues, its solution is not clear. In fact, this lack of clarity is another reason that so many psychologists have abandoned the problem altogether—it appears to be unsolvable. However, similar to many seemingly unsolvable problems, the unsolvability of the free will/determinism issue stems from its framing as a problem.

In this case, modernism has framed it as a dichotomy, an either/or incompatibility. Determinism is commonly defined as the assumption that all human actions are caused and thus cannot have happened otherwise than they did (Blanshard, 1958; O'Connor, 1971; Slife & Williams, 1995; Valentine, 1992, p. 15; Van Inwagen, 1986; Viney, 1993). All human thoughts and behaviors must have happened the way they did because they are the result of certain antecedent conditions. Free will, by contrast, is the assumption that the agent could have acted otherwise, all other factors remaining the same (Howard, 1994; May, 1969; Rychlak, 1992; Slife & Williams, 1995; Valentine, 1992, p. 8; Van Inwagen, 1986; Viney, 1993). That is, all humans can choose to act or think differently than they did, "independent of antecedent conditions" (Viney, 1993, p. 27; cf. Sauvayre, 1995).

These definitions form a prototypical, modernistic dualism—an either/or framework. Either we have an ability to act otherwise

and thus have a free will or we do not have this ability and thus are determined. Either we are independent of, and thus free of, the antecedent conditions that could determine our "will" or we are dependent on, and thus determined by, such conditions. We will later explicate the modernist reasoning behind this either/or characterization of free will and determinism. The point, at this juncture, is that psychologists have relegated themselves—by definition—to a modernistic dualism that assumes the two constructs are incompatible (Slife, 1994).

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

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

The modernist dilemma seems clear at this point. On one hand, modernist theorizing permits only a dualism of free will and determinism— an either/or conception. Either a "will" is independent of the past (and thus is free) or a "will" is dependent on the past (and thus is determined); it cannot be both independent and dependent at the same time. On the other hand, this dualistic system is difficult to understand because people's choices and decisions only make sense in light of their past experiences. Moreover, research findings and even our practical (e.g., therapeutic) experiences appear to indicate strongly the importance of both factors. However, the theoretical incompatibility of these factors—the modernist either/or conception—would indicate that this is not possible.

## A CASE EXAMPLE AND THE MODERNIST DILEMMA

At this point, we attempt to illustrate the modernist dilemma in a case study. Consider a young adult woman we will call Mary. She sought psychotherapy because she was struggling with issues surrounding sexual abuse, allegedly perpetrated by her father when she was a child. Mary had recently accepted a job in which she would soon be working near her father, and the anticipated increase in interaction with her father precipitated Mary's entrance into therapy. Although she had never reported it to anyone, Mary believed that when she was a child, her father had inappropriately fondled her on several occasions while he bathed her.

After several sessions of individual therapy, Mary decided to divulge this information to her mother in therapy. Mary's mother, however, insisted that she had been present at the bathings when the alleged abuse had occurred. She denied that abuse of any sort had occurred, though she admitted that Mary's father had touched her genitals with a wash cloth. In fact, she adamantly maintained that she would never have allowed any type of "fondling" to occur. After hearing her mother's account, Mary confessed to "now vaguely remembering flashes" of her mother's presence during the bathings, though Mary still insisted that sexual abuse had occurred.

Therapy proceeded with both Mary and her mother. At one point in the joint sessions, Mary reported realizing that her memories of the abuse had historically only bothered her when her rela-

tionship with her father had been strained. As near as Mary could remember, the abuse was not an issue for her when her relationship with her father was neutral or satisfying. For instance, the abuse was not relevant to her as an adolescent, when she and her father experienced a relatively caring and supportive relationship. She reported that during this period, the bathing incidents were "only a dim memory" if she "remembered them at all." Partly at the urging of her mother, Mary decided to confront her father in therapy about the alleged abuse. Mary's father expressed shock and consistently denied his participation in the alleged abuse. Mary, however, steadfastly maintained her abuse accusations in spite of her father's elaborate denials.

We should note, at this point, that the participants in this therapy are conceptually relegated to either a deterministic or a free will understanding of the issues involved. Perhaps most centrally, Mary could be free of, or determined by, the alleged sexual abuse. If she were free of the past, then none of her current problems could be attributed to her past. There would be no point in discerning the "facts" of the past, other than to affix criminal blame on Mary's father for the early abuse. In any case, Mary's father could not be blamed for Mary's current psychological problems. Even theories that consider past sexual abuse influential but not determinative do not resolve the modernist dilemma because Mary's free will would always be able to override any nondeterminative influence. Mary, in this sense, is responsible for her symptoms.

On the other hand, if Mary were determined by her past, then she was caused by these events. Finding out what actually happened in the past would be a pivotal part of any therapy process. That is, therapy approaches that attempt to uncover a factual account of the past are often underlaid with some sort of modernist determinism because such a determinism assumes that all psychological problems began in cause and effect chains that stem from the past, however recent (e.g., stimuli) or remote (e.g., childhood traumas) in time. As it happened, this deterministic framework was Mary's own, informal theory and thus, she reasoned, the source of her anger toward, and fear of, her father. In deference to her, therapy began on this deterministic basis.

The crux of Mary's first concerns was to find out what actually happened in the past so that she could at least understand herself better. If the abuse had occurred as Mary had remembered, she would have every right to her feelings and the emotional distance

she felt from her father. Experiencing such traumatic abuse would certainly cause her to feel angry and betrayed. Under these circumstances, how could she have a real choice about her feelings? The abusive events would have been responsible for her current feelings and her relational stance toward her father. Furthermore, Mary's father would have been viewed as a child abuser—as someone with serious pathology. If he had committed these acts in the past, he might be suspected of other potential abuses, with other consequences for those individuals. The upshot is that if the abuse could be established through the facts of the past, then specific consequences, including Mary's resentful feelings, would be expected to follow. Indeed, these consequences would be determined to follow.

If, on the other hand, the abuse did not occur, then Mary's father would have been vindicated, and something probably would have been wrong with Mary. She would have imagined her past, and her feelings and relations with her father would have no factual or causal legitimacy. She presumably would have no right to her feelings, and her actions would have no meaning in relation to her past. Mary would have concocted these memories, lacked a reason for her current feelings and behaviors, and falsely accused her father. In this sense, the facts of the past are important to both scenarios about the existence of the abuse; both scenarios attribute causal significance to past events. It is no surprise, then, that many therapists and clients attempt to ascertain the facts of the past (e.g., a "history") whenever possible.

Unfortunately for Mary and her father, their arguments about the nature of the past were unproductive. Although evidence and witnesses, such as Mary's mother, were marshaled for both sides, a consistent pattern of accusation and denial emerged between Mary and her father that seemed to deepen rather than resolve the problems. It was soon apparent to all concerned that this more deterministic tack was leading the therapy nowhere. At this point, Mary's father offered a variation on what can be considered a modernist, free will approach. He pleaded for Mary to "let go" of the past. Without admitting his guilt (or any particular rendition of the past), he proposed that "we all let bygones be bygones" and choose to move beyond the events of 20 years ago. Her father's request assumed that Mary could free herself from her past. Hopefully, she could transcend her past and thus escape altogether her feelings of anger and resentment.

Although Mary confessed that her father's proposal made logical sense, she found herself psychologically unable to comply with it. She tried to "let go" of the past, but found she could not. She simply could not deny her past; she felt, as she put it, "that I would be denying some part of myself." It is interesting that Mary's father discovered similar difficulties because he too could not deny the more immediate past—namely, that his daughter had accused him of abusing her. He could not simply "choose" to forego his resentment toward her. In other words, the past could not be simply "let go," either by Mary or her father. The past was integral to their present relationship and could not be dismissed or discounted.

At this point, the participants in the case were caught in the modernist dilemma. Either Mary was determined by her past, in which case the facts of the past were crucial, or Mary was free of her past, in which case she should have been able to forego the past, whatever actually happened. The problem was that neither therapeutic tack seemed productive. Many psychotherapists, under similar circumstances, have desired an alternative therapy framework that avoids this either/or framework and leads to other therapeutic options. Although we sympathize with this desire—indeed, it is supported by research and practical experiences, as we have stated—the modernist framework cannot ultimately meet this desire. This does not mean, of course, that modernists have not tried. That is, modernist theorizing has not ignored the incompatibility problem—the either/or conception of free will and determinism. However, modernist approaches to the problem have rarely been made explicit, particularly in a therapeutic context. Therefore, we attempt to make these approaches explicit here.

## THE MODERNIST SOLUTION

The most prominent modernist approaches to solving the either/or dilemma entail some sort of "soft determinism," or the past as an "influence." Although there are several differing forms of soft determinism (e.g., Robinson, 1985; Rychlak, 1981; Sauvayre, 1995; Van Inwagen, 1986),[3] most forms attempt to account for "subjective" factors, such as will, thoughts, and feelings, without violating the doctrine of universal causation (Van Inwagen, 1986). Universal causation is the notion that all events, including

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

Unfortunately, this "solution" rarely satisfies the modernist advocate of free will. If the cause of a person's will or choice stems from events that precede it in time, then the will or choice can no longer be said to be freely willed or freely chosen. It would be a determined will, in the same sense that a billiard ball's motion is determined by the ball that rolled into it. To truly have a free will, from the modernist perspective, is to be the uncaused cause of one's will. That is, people must be the originative agents of their own actions, and this agency is impossible in a conventional, cause and effect understanding of these actions (cf. Rychlak, 1981, 1988). This is the reason many modernists have argued that a free will is ultimately random and unpredictable (e.g., Heiman, 1995); it has no cause (at least in the conventional sense) and thus cannot be predicted from knowledge of the past.

Many psychologists, at this point, might want to assert that such an originative, uncaused cause is impossible, but this type of assertion is part of the problem. If universal causation is affirmed—that is, if all events have causes—then determinism reigns and free will is impossible in the conventional modernist sense. In other words, the compatibilism of soft determinism must hold that other factors, such as the environment and/or biochemistry, ultimately determine subjective factors. As Sauvayre (1995) noted,

> Most versions of what is called "compatibilism" seem to present the conciliatory stance that freedom and determinism are compatible (Dennett, 1984), but they do so by interpreting the claims of freedom in the language of determinism, as a particular form of [soft] determinism. (p. 157)

Soft determinism, then, does not take into account both free will and determinism; it merely makes free will factors into determined factors. Choices cannot be choices in the conventional sense

of being able to do otherwise because all choices are themselves the effects of previous causes.

This problem with soft determinism has prompted some modernists to contend that people are free to some degree and determined by their environment and/or neurochemistry to some degree (cf. Slife, 1994). However, this part-free/part-determined approach cannot be a solution because the extent to which the person's will is free is the extent to which it is independent or free of the past (and other determined factors). The modernist dilemma is merely recapitulated in the free portion of this approach.

Other modernists attempt a similar approach to this dilemma by emphasizing the influence of antecedent conditions. Although this emphasis makes sense out of many people's experiences of themselves and others—that is, factors associated with both free will and determinism seem simultaneously important—it begs the question of how this influence occurs. That is, the notion that the past "influences" our choices without determining them is consistent with research and experience, but it does not explain how this influencing is accomplished. Typically, as soon as this influence is specified, a cause and effect framework is involved, and determinism is required (Rychlak, 1981; Slife, 1993; Slife & Williams, 1995). As we will attempt to demonstrate, the modernist framework for the free will and determinism issue disallows any influence of the past, except through causal determinism. Some postmodernists, however, have proposed an alternative framework that allows for the influence of the past without a reduction to causality.

## A POSTMODERN RENDERING

The key to this postmodern framework, as the title of Heidegger's (1926/1962) noted book, *Being and Time*, indicates, is the assumption of time. This key may be surprising to many psychologists because psychologists rarely discuss their beliefs about time. Time is viewed as a variable to be investigated rather than as a belief that exists prior to investigation. Still, Slife (1993) has shown that a particular view of time—linear time—is not only endemic to psychology's theorizing but also inherent in psychology's conventional scientific methods (see Slife's [1993] Chapters 3 and 4). As it happens, one of linear time's many implications for psychology is its either/or framework for free will and determinism. In this sense,

linear time is a prime factor in modernism's free will/determinism framework. A postmodern alternative to linear time may help us overcome this dualism, allowing our theories and therapies to better reflect our research findings and our practical experiences.

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

This view includes several properties that are derived from the metaphor of the line. For our purposes, the most important property of this metaphor is the familiar notion that the three dimensions of time—past, present, and future—occur in a sequence of one continuous flow (as a line). The past precedes the present, which in turn precedes the future. Although the present is where we exist and live, it is but a durationless instant—a point on the line—separating the past from the future. One relatively overlooked implication of this linear view is its separation of the three dimensions of time. Because each dimension occurs in sequence, each is conceptually and physically separate from the others. Each dimension occurs in its turn along the line of time. For instance, the present cannot exist in the past, and the past cannot exist in the present. Present moments are only present for an instant before they pass into the past. In short, there can be no integration of time's dimensions.

Despite the separation of the past, present, and future, linear theorists discuss the influence of the past in the present as if the

past were somehow in the present. How is this influence accomplished with sequential time dimensions? How does a linear theorist bridge the gap between the immediate (or distant) objective past and the present instant? The answer is the linear view of causality. This form of causality was historically conceived by modernist scientists and philosophers for just this bridging function (Slife, 1993; Slife & Williams, 1995). In this sense, the linear view of time is historically responsible for the linear view of causality.

Linear time does to causality what it does to all processes; it distributes causality across itself—along the line of time. Cause and effect are therefore thought to occur in sequence, with cause preceding effect. Past events, then, determine present and future events. This conception, of course, is our Western culture's conventional view of causality, but it is a view brought about by the historic advent of linear time (Bunge, 1959, 1963; Rakover, 1990; Slife, 1993, pp. 230-234). Causality does not itself require this sequentiality. As the noted physicist and philosopher on causation, Mario Bunge (1959), has demonstrated, "the principle of antecedence and the causal principle are independent of each other" (p. 63; cf. Bunge, 1963, p. 189; see also Rakover, 1990; Rychlak, 1994; Slife & Williams, 1995). Although a reverse sequence—the effect preceding the cause—is not possible in principle, there is no violation of the principle of causation for the cause to be simultaneous with the effect (Brand, 1976, p. 89; Bunge, 1959, p. 63; 1963, p. 189; Rakover, 1990, p. 37; Rychlak, 1981, pp. 768-773; Slife, 1993, pp. 230-234; Slife & Williams, 1995, pp. 100-115).

Linear time, however, sequences all events, including causes and effects. According to this view, the causes of all effects stem from the past. This linear view of causality, then, is the bridge between the past and the present.[4] The past cannot be in the present, by linear time definition, but the past can seemingly be brought to the present through this notion of causality. Unfortunately, this causal bridge has an unintended and overlooked consequence. The determinism inherent in causality destroys free will as well as other related constructs such as choice, decision making, transcendence, agency, self-determination, and self-influence. Because the present and future must be rigidly and deterministically consistent with the past, there is no room for free will or even the possibility of a truly self-initiated change in the present. This linear notion of causality—brought about by the linear notion of time—is the source of the either/or dichotomy for free will and

determinism in psychology. Because the past is separated from the present and because causality is needed to bridge this separation, the present is simply a byproduct—an ending effect—of the past. Thus, the import of the present as a separate time dimension is lost. The present becomes an extension of the immutable past.

From this modernist perspective, the only way to envision free will or agency in clients (and therapists) is to deny the influence of the past altogether—at least for their free will decisions. This is the reason that theorists have traditionally defined free will as being "free of" or "independent of" the past (e.g., Sauvayre, 1995; Viney, 1993, p. 27). Any connection to the past would have to be a causal connection, and a free will would immediately lose its freeness. Given our linear understanding of time and causality, the only conceivable connection between the past and present—the only way that the past can be brought to the present to influence it—is a causal connection. In this sense, our modernist either/or is manifested: Either the present is an effect of the past or the present is completely cut off from the past.

How are these modernist conceptions manifested in Mary's case? From a modernist deterministic position, Mary's alleged sexual abuse (her past) would have caused and determined her angry and resentful feelings in the present. Her abusive history would be set in stone; one cannot change a linear past. Psychologically damaging consequences would inevitably follow from such an immutable past. If nothing else, the early abuse would be understood by the modernist as providing a poor foundation for other, later, male relationships. However, all sorts of other linear explanations are possible, with other schools of modernist thought.

Psychotherapists who champion free will, on the other hand, would undoubtedly be unhappy with this deterministic rendering of Mary because her choices would not really be her choices (in the sense of being able to think and act "otherwise" than her abuse). To maintain a conception of a free will, Mary's therapist would have to encourage her to deny her past, however conscious this encouragement might be, because any connection to her past would automatically be a causal connection. Any notion that her present actions were free or self-initiated would be destroyed if they were connected at all to abusive events (or any other past events). The problem with this conception is that a denial of the past leaves the present without context. If Mary's past is overridden by her free will, what accounts for her present feelings and memories? From

this modernist perspective, the therapist is left either with Mary's being completely determined or with her personal past's being completely imaginary in some way. Neither option is terribly appealing to many therapists.

These unappealing options are, again, because the therapist is essentially saddled with the two horns of the modernist dilemma: Either the therapist embraces the present only (for "free will" decisions) because the influence of the past must be denied, or the therapist embraces the past only (for determinism) because the present must be an extension (via causality) of the past. In either case, this dualistic framework means that we cannot account for our experience of the past permeating the present—in our lives, in our research, and in our therapy. The only means of accounting for this experience is through a causal connection to the past, and, because the linear view of time considers the past to be unchangeable, the present itself—as an effect of that past—is considered to be unchangeable and thus determined.

This implication is not a hopeful one for therapy (which, of course, takes place in the present) because it means that all participants in therapy are themselves simply the effects of an unchangeable past. No self-initiated change is therefore possible, even on the part of the therapist. However, it is important to remember that this theoretical dilemma is the result of our initial premise of linear time, namely that the three dimensions of time must be considered sequential and separate. Is it possible to begin with a new assumption of time—one that accounts for our experience and the research data—and avoid the dilemma altogether?

## A POSTMODERN SOLUTION

Some postmodernists answer this question affirmatively because alternative views of time are available. We explore one promising view here, though we do not mean to offer it as representative of postmodernism in general. We mean to offer it as one possibility within a prominent postmodern tradition. This particular view of time, referred to as temporality in some texts, was specifically formulated to reflect our lived experience (Gadamer, 1993; Gelven, 1989; Heidegger, 1926/1962) and thus has import for our lived experiences as professionals (e.g., in therapy). Many postmodernists in psychology contend that this view also reflects our

research findings as scientists (Faulconer, 1990; Faulconer & Williams, 1985, 1990; Fuller, 1990; Slife, 1993, pp. 239-270; Slife, 1998). For instance, temporality is able to welcome all the factors associated with free will and determinism that have demonstrated effectiveness in psychological treatment. No either/or dichotomizing is necessary. Indeed, temporality allows for the past to be a meaningful influence in the present without the present being a mere effect of the past.

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

This synchrony may seem provocative and perhaps even counterintuitive. It is provocative in the sense that it is an unfamiliar, little-known assumption of time in comparison to the pervasive, almost axiomatic assumption of linear time. However, temporality is not provocative because it violates our intuition or experience; rather, it is provocative because it violates a familiar intellectual abstraction—linear time. Although everyone has presumably experienced the direction of change (time), no one has seen the line of time that supposedly marks this change, except as an intellectual abstraction (e.g., a grammar school line of historic events). That is, Western thinkers have been taught to organize change in a linear manner, but this does not mean that this linear organization is a person's experience of change itself (i.e., linear time is not time itself). On the contrary, Heidegger (1926/1962), Bergson (1959), Gadamer (1993), and others (Bohm, 1980; Jung, 1960; Lewin, 1936) claim that time, as experienced, is at least as much

simultaneous as sequential. These thinkers do not deny that we experience a sequentiality of sorts, with some events happening—as a narrative—before other events. Still, postmodernists in the Heideggerian tradition do not deny that we also experience the simultaneity of time's dimensions.

As already described, many people have a strong intuitive sense that their past pervades their present. Familiarity with things and places is vital to the present. How one interprets events and renders judgments depends on one's memories and prior information. Memories and information from the past exist completely in the "now." Indeed, this is the reason memories are subject to the vagaries of present moods and circumstances (e.g., Ellis & Hunt, 1989; Loftus, 1993; Loftus & Ketchum, 1991); they occur in the present to be influenced by the present. These postmodernists also claim that we have an intuitive feeling for the presentness of our future. Many, if not all, of one's present actions are oriented toward the future in the sense of expectations, anticipations, and goals (Bakan, 1996; Bohart, 1993). This future is not the unreachable future of the linear theorist. Goals and expectations are present images of the future. They do not exist except in the "now," affecting one's actions in the present and one's memory of the past. Indeed, neither the past nor the future can exist for us experientially except in the present.

Of course, this postmodern present is not the durationless instant of the linear view. This present is often termed by these theorists the "lived now"—an experienced, practical present that requires as context the lived past and lived future.[5] The present is always "coming from" and "going to" somewhere in Heidegger's (1926/1962) framework. We are always in the midst of a story, the text of our own autobiography. However, this coming from and going to does not require separate dimensions of time—the past and the future—at least not separate in the sense of linearly sequential and hence independent of one another. The postmodern "now" encompasses all three dimensions, including our memories and culture (the past) and our anticipations and expectations (the future). Just as the understanding of any moment of a story requires knowing (in the present) what has happened before and anticipating (in the present) what is about to happen, so too any moment of time is considered to require both the synchronous past and co-occurring future. In this sense, then, the simultaneity of the

three dimensions of time is not counterintuitive; it is thoroughly intuitive and experiential.

The modernist might be willing to grant this experiential nature of time but distinguish it from nonexperienced, objective time. In other words, the linear view would be objective time and the temporal view would be subjective time. The problem with this distinction is that postmodernists do not recognize the two realms of objectivity and subjectivity, at least as ontologically separate realms. This type of postmodernist begins with the assumption that there is only the experienced realm, which is neither subjective nor objective in nature. This experienced realm is "reality." However, it is an interpreted reality rather than an objective reality. Because no one ever gets outside his or her experience, any "objective reality" is irrelevant anyway. In this sense, the linear view of time is one interpretation of reality, and the temporal view of time is another, incompatible interpretation of reality. Both are experiential, and neither is or can be objective in the conventional sense.

The alternative temporal view can now be specifically applied to our free will/determinism dilemma. Recall that the root of the dilemma is the separation of the past from the present and future—a linear framework. This means that linear causality, and thus traditional determinism, is necessary to bridge this separation. Modernist theorists are left with the option of either affirming this causal bridge (in which case the present is determined by the past) or denying this bridge (in which case the present is free of the past).

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

## A POSTMODERN TURN IN THE CASE

To illustrate this postmodern view, let us return to the case of Mary. Unlike the modernist framing of this case, which left therapy at a virtual standstill, this postmodern framework opened healing possibilities for Mary. The therapist and Mary were not confined to an either/or: either a deterministic or a free will approach to therapy. With the modernist constraints of linear time and causality removed and a postmodernist perspective substituted, Mary could take account of her past without being determined (in a linear sense) by it. Because Mary's past, present, and future were assumed to co-occur in her lived "now," other possibilities were presented for handling her past (the alleged abuse) and her future (her anticipated move near her father).

Before describing how these postmodern assumptions influenced therapy with Mary, we must express a word of caution: We do not consider this postmodern framework to be a new school of thought with new therapeutic techniques and strategies. It is, in a sense, more radical than that. It is, instead, an attempt to capture what effective therapists are already doing and experiencing—intuitively. Consonant with Hoshmand and Polkinghorne's (1992) call for using practice as a source of knowledge and clinical insight, this brand of postmodernism attempts to take seriously the lived experiences of therapists with regard to such pivotal issues as free will and determinism. This postmodern approach, then, is an attempt to catch theory up to practice.

Using a postmodern theoretical lens to view the case, therapy with Mary moved to an exploration of the lived "now" of her relationship with her father. This now focus began with everyone in Mary's family acknowledging the futility of either debating the reality of the past or letting the meanings of the past go—manifestations of modernism. Past events were not considered responsible for Mary's feelings, but the importance of their meaning was never denied. It was simply acknowledged that Mary's actions, thoughts, and feelings were not determined by past events (in the traditional sense). Mary had possibilities. She was not trapped by past events in the present. Indeed, her past was a source of opportunities rather than immutabilities.

For example, Mary's remembering that her mother had been present at the bathings—a change from her previous memories of the abuse—seemed to signify for her this lack of trappedness.

Mary never questioned her abuse, but somehow her mother's presence—both in the past and in the present—implied possibilities both in the past and in the present. Mary also became more sensitized to her varying relationship with her father over the years. When her abuse was salient, Mary tended to assume that her relationship with her father had always been negative. However, treating her past as mutable rather than immutable allowed her to become aware of the many times in her life when she and her father had had a positive relationship.

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

This challenge of the past is only possible if the experienced meanings of the past, present, and future co-occur. Because all temporal dimensions are considered simultaneous, change in any one dimension simultaneously affects changes in other dimensions. Hence, as Mary's present experience of her father changed, the meaning of her past memories of him began to change as well. As she and her father grew closer, the issues related to the alleged abuse (and her conceptions of him as a result) became more distant, though they were never "let go." Mary and her father gained instead a present way of dealing with these past issues.

Many modernists will immediately wish to distinguish between subjective meanings and the objective facts of the past. The meanings of our subjective experiences can change in this manner, they might say, but the objective facts of this past cannot. Yet, it is this very subjective/objective distinction that the postmodernist wishes to dissolve. Mary and her father do not live in the objective past, even if there were such an entity (and its existence is quite debatable)[6] (cf. Slife, 1993). Mary and her father do not live outside

their experiences; they live in and with the meanings of their experiences, which is, in a sense, a combination of the "subjective" and the "objective"—an interpreted reality. The issue for psychotherapy, then, is never, and will never be, the objective past, even if it does exist in some metaphysical realm. The issue for psychotherapy is the issue for Mary and her father—their meanings—and these meanings cannot occur without the experienced past and the experienced future to inform the present.

As it happens, Mary's future was also explored. After all, it was her expectation of increased contact with her father (because of her upcoming job) that brought Mary into therapy in the first place. From a postmodernist perspective, this expectation was her future in the now. The "now" of therapy allowed Mary to vocalize her fears of harsh judgment from her father when she assumed the job. Although this vocalization revealed several unresolved conflicts between her and her father, Mary also realized that these conflicts—possibly the main reason she feared working near her father and sought therapy—had "nothing at all to do with the abuse." To her amazement, these conflicts seemed more connected to her idealized adolescence, when the alleged abuse was, by her account, a "dim memory." Apparently, Mary had experienced a "good relationship" with her father during much of her adolescence. The problem was that she had connected this good relationship with her father's approval at the time and now feared that her father would disapprove of her when she moved closer to him. The point is that her future expectations could only exist in the now, affecting her present actions (e.g., seeking therapy) and her past memories (e.g., the salience of her alleged abuse). In this sense, the most direct route to the problem precipitating therapy was not her linear past but her nonlinear future.

## CONCLUSION

This case is not presented as a "proof" for the efficacy of a postmodern approach to the free will/determinism dilemma. Its main function is to illustrate how a therapist in the postmodern tradition might handle free will and determinism issues differently than a modernist. As exemplified by Mary and her father's wrangling over the events of her alleged abuse, the hunt for an objective, linear past is often elusive, if not unproductive.[7] This hunt is

inspired by modernist determinism and linear time where the past—immediate or distant—is viewed as the only source of explanation and understanding. The problem with this hunt is that therapists rarely, if ever, have direct access to the past. What is often taken to be the objective past is a client's rendition of his or her history or a therapist's reasoning backward from a client's symptoms. These strategies are suspect, if not dangerous, as evidenced by the false memory debate (Loftus, 1993; Wakefield & Underwager, 1992). Even if the past is somehow known with certainty, the determinism that underlies these strategies sends many dubious messages to clients about their inability to control themselves and generate change.

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

Mary's case illustrates the importance of an alternative postmodern framework for these issues. Each dimension of time cannot be understood except in relation to the other dimensions. For instance, Mary's alleged abuse (in the past) was never a problem during harmonious relations with her father (in the present), and it was her future—her upcoming job—that made her abuse the initial focus of therapy. Moreover, Mary's past seemed to be more mutable than immutable. Her lived past was constantly in flux as her present relationship with her father changed. This is not to deny the importance of her past. Her early "abuse" and adolescence were both grounding factors in her current and anticipated interactions with her father. However, this more familiar, past-to-

present explanation does not require a causal bridge (and thus a determinism) in a postmodern account because the past and present are not viewed as separate entities that necessitate such a bridge. In this sense, Mary's choices were real choices, but her choices were continually grounded in her temporal history.

## NOTES

1. We are aware that many consider postmodernism to mean the social constructionist tradition, which is a different branch of postmodernism than the one discussed in this article (cf. Slife, 1998, in press). The Heidegger/Gadamer tradition is often referred to as hermeneutics to distinguish it, in part, from social constructionism.

2. One can, of course, assert that empirical methods have been highly successful. However, this assertion is merely opinion, however widely it is held, without scientific evidence of this success. Moreover, this assertion typically involves the successes of the natural sciences, which may or may not reflect on the distinctive nature of psychological research.

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

4. Indeed, one could say the only thing that allows for sequential causality to truly be causal is the simultaneous contact of the two events.

5. Heidegger (1926/1962) shifts the meaning of the present from that in which something occurs to the actual carrying out of an action. Ontologically conceived, the present is making present (Gelven, 1989).

6. No one can observe or measure this objective past. From a postmodern perspective, it is an abstraction, an intellectual invention intended to serve the conceptual scaffold of the modernist. Historians can observe artifacts of this past, and photographers can take pictures of the past, but these artifacts and pictures are inevitably interpreted in light of the present (Gadamer, 1993; Slife, 1993).

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

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