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The Post-Modern Mind: *Key Characteristics of Modernity and Post-Modernity*

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ABSTRACT: This essay discusses the major characteristics of modernity and post-modernity presented in *Passion of the Western Mind* by contemporary depth psychologist and philosopher Richard Tarnas. The study, which examines this important book on the nature and history of Western thought, summarizes Tarnas's view of the larger cultural and historical contexts in which the dominant epistemologies and perspectives of modernity and post-modernity evolved and in which contemporary academic discourse is embedded. Intended for students and scholars in the humanistic social sciences and the theological and religious arts and humanities, the study serves as a basic introduction to some of the distinctive features of modern and post-modern philosophical ideas. As such the essay is less a thesis-driven argument than a brief introduction to the history of philosophical ideas that have shaped the evolution of major concepts and definable characteristics of modern and post-modern discourse.

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This essay presumes the following: that no serious student or scholar engaged in the contemporary social sciences and arts and humanities can afford to ignore the overarching intellectual context and milieu in which contemporary academic discourse takes place.¹ In short, we must

¹ I would extend this statement to include the multiple academic disciplines generally as post-modern thought holds broad implications to epistemologies beyond the social sciences and humanities. Post-modern thought is transforming the interpretation of reality, with transformative implications for the physical sciences, including cosmology, and practical

understand the largely unconscious prejudices embedded in both modern Western thought and its more recent elaborations and critiques in late modernity or what many theorists define as “post-modernity.” The contemporary historical-cultural frame of Western academic discourse—including the humanistic social sciences and arts and humanities—is generally characterized by post-Enlightenment thought and its dominant paradigms of philosophical and scientific positivism, secular humanism, scientific materialism, and related factors. To this framing conception of reality and contemporary epistemological landscape must be added, more recently, a radical multi-disciplinary deconstructive challenge to this dominant worldview represented in the epistemological challenges brought by what may be broadly described as post-modern thought and its pervasive criticisms of the inherited truths of dominant secular authority. This critical conversation between modernity and post-modern criticism profoundly influences common discourse and debate within the contemporary Academy.

And yet, in this author’s experience, many students developing and advancing theories and methods within the contemporary Academy lack even a basic understanding of the worldviews in which their ideas—and lives—are embedded and shaped. Within the Academy, an important conversation is currently taking shape, both inside and outside of the classroom—a multi-perspectival debate about the nature of reality and truth that is also clearly manifest in popular socio-political culture. This at times messy dialogue, including the capacity for language-based knowledge itself, seems highly relevant to students of the social sciences and religious humanities, among other academic disciplines currently and in years ahead, as a distinctly post-modern “hermeneutics of suspicion” engages in critical conversations with forms of received knowledge concerning the nature of truth and reality.

This essay attempts to address this situation for students and scholars by providing a basic introduction to this important and exceedingly complex topic by attempting to answer two basic questions: What are the defining salient characteristics of modernity? And what are the defining

implications in the broader cultural discourse of our civil society, evidenced in both positive and negative cultural effects both in America and abroad.

salient characteristics of so-called post-modernity? My thesis, closely parallel to that of Tarnas, is that modernity and post-modernity possess unique characteristics that can be clearly defined, and which set them apart from the worldviews of the Middle Ages and Greek antiquity that preceded modernity.

The essay addresses these questions and characteristics through the lens of the influential book *Passion of the Western Mind* by depth psychologist, philosopher, and cosmologist Richard Tarnas.² The discussion is based on a close reading and analysis of this text, augmented by supplemental readings from other sources. As a Jungian depth psychologist, my own research is situated at the intersection of Jung's scientific theories (and those of interdisciplinary scholars influenced by Jung) as well as in the theological and religious arts and humanities. This essay represents my engagement with the larger cultural and historical context in which Jung's psychological theories and methods—as well as the discipline of depth psychology as a whole and the academic study of the religious arts and humanities—must make their way across the contemporary, mainstream epistemological landscape. The following essay broadly defines the salient characteristics of the modern and post-modern mind described by Tarnas and others.

In *Passion of the Western Mind* (hereafter *Passion*), Tarnas offers a sweeping overview of the history of the major ideas shaping Western thought from the ancient Greeks and medieval theologians to contemporary epistemologies. As a brief summary and reiteration of the last stage of Tarnas's ambitious narrative—*Passion* itself represents a condensed summation of the major ideas shaping more than 2,000 years of evolving Western ideas on the nature of reality—this study represents a basic introduction to modern and post-modern Western thought. To acknowledge the study's limitations up front: the perspective brought to the subject is based mostly on the limited perspective of a single interdisciplinary author (i.e., Tarnas) who is both a depth psychologist and

² Richard Tarnas, *Passion of the Western Mind: Understanding the Ideas That Have Shaped Our World View* (New York: Ballantine, 1991). The extensive paraphrasing and direct quotations attributed to Tarnas throughout the article are all citations from *Passion of the Western Mind*.

a philosopher.³ Interested readers, presumptively students engaged in the social sciences and/or humanities, are encouraged to read *Passion* in its entirety for a better understanding of the complex and nuanced historical contexts and developments of these major epistemological debates throughout the centuries, as well as the primary source materials of psychology, philosophy, theology, and other disciplines to which they refer.⁴ This essay focuses on Tarnas's extensive argument and discourse in *Passion*, with which I largely agree, from the perspective of Jungian psychology as the natural heir to Romanticism in philosophy, itself a somewhat marginalized philosophical approach given new life by post-modern critiques of inherited Western authorities and mainstream biases. To Tarnas's central scholarly narrative, I add the more personal, and personally sympathetic, perspective of systematic Dominican theologian and philosopher Fr. Edward Krasevac.⁵ According to Krasevac modernity (i.e., the "modern mind") began approximately around 1350-1400 A.D., emerging from the late medieval period and ending in the 19th to 20th centuries following the decentering discoveries of Karl Marx, Charles Darwin, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Sigmund Freud. Many scholars associate post-modernity with the school of French Continental philosophy emerging in the late 1970s, increasingly influential in contemporary 21st century epistemologies. This is a useful historical model for present purposes, although it should be noted from the outset that the very concept of post-modernity is a subject of controversy among contemporary scholars, some of whom argue that no such distinction as post-modern exists, being rather a continuation of modernity in its latest phase. Michel Foucault, for

³ While *Passion* represents a brilliant synthesis of the main currents of Western thought from the pre-Socratic Greeks to post-modernity, it is itself a secondary source and one among many attempts to define the emerging phenomenon of post-modern thought. Other perspectives should be considered. For an alternative example of a concise attempt to define post-modernity, see Daniel Salberg, Robert Stewart, Karla Wesley, and Shannon Weiss, "Postmodernism and Its Critics" (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Department of Anthropology, 2017), <https://anthropology.ua.edu/theory/postmodernism-and-its-critics/> (accessed January 20, 2018).

⁴ For the reader interested in deeper study of post-modern thought, the primary sources for Tarnas listed in his comprehensive Bibliography, 494-512, are highly recommended reading.

⁵ As both an individual who is a person of faith (i.e., a Catholic priest) living in post-modern secular society and a professional academic and theologian, Fr. Krasevac anchors the relevance of Tarnas's history of Western thought in his own practical life. See the discussion in Concluding Remarks, 20.

example, increasingly cited as one of the influential pioneers of post-structuralism and post-modernism, defined his approach as a critical history of modernity and rejected such labels. Such cautionary notes aside, let us begin with the historical emergence of the modern mind, discussed at length by Tarnas.

Foundations of the Modern Western Mind

Modernity emerged out of the Renaissance and Reformation, which set the stage for the Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment and a parallel philosophical revolution that laid the foundations of a modern *Weltanschauung* (i.e., worldview) that largely replaced the worldviews of Greek classicism as well as the Christian worldview that prevailed throughout the Middle Ages.⁶ In short, the traditional metaphysically based worldviews, from the pre-Greeks to the Renaissance, began a historical transformation that resulted in the emerging dominance of secularism, one of the hallmarks of modernity. In contrast to the classical worldview of the ancient Greeks and the Christian, largely Catholic, worldview that dominated Western thought during the millennia-long Middle Ages, the modern mind, said Tarnas, rebelled against the authority of the Church and authority of the ancients, that is, against a supernatural, religious sensibility as the established basis of reality and truth. Tarnas described the transformations of the Renaissance and Reformation as decisive historical phases emerging out of late medievalism, appropriating intellectual and epistemological frameworks for achieving progress from religious authority to its emerging new locus in secular humanism, in stark contrast with the greater reliance of earlier ages given to conceptions of God (or gods) and subsequent dependence on supernatural-metaphysical conceptions of the world.

The intermingling epochs of the Renaissance, Reformation, Scientific Revolution, and Enlightenment that gave birth to modernity are extremely complex and, in a brief essay such as this, must be reduced to a few summary highlights. Within the span of a single generation, Leonardo Da Vinci and Michelangelo produced their great artistic masterworks,

⁶ Tarnas, 223-324.

Christopher Columbus voyaged to the New World, Martin Luther rebelled against the Church, and the Copernican Scientific Revolution began.⁷ A distinctively new type of Western personality emerged out of this maelstrom of creativity, adventurism, and rebellion,⁸ marked by “individualism, secularity, strength of will, multiplicity of interest and impulse, creative innovation, and a willingness to defy traditional limitations on human activity.”⁹ This spirit of humanism spread quickly across Europe “providing the lineaments of the modern character,” and from the Renaissance a new consciousness emerged characterized as “expansive, rebellious, energetic and creative, individualistic, ambitious and often unscrupulous.”¹⁰

Soon thereafter, the continuing moral deterioration of the papacy led to Luther’s rebellion against the Church and its practices of indulgences, democratizing Christianity by making the individual Christian’s unmediated access to God and divine revelation the cornerstone of faith and knowledge of the world. In the conservative spirit of the Renaissance, Luther’s return to religious fundamentalism simultaneously gave form to an “emerging spirit of rebellious, self-determining individualism, particularly the growing impulse for intellectual and spiritual independence.”¹¹ These qualities became major characteristics of the modern and post-modern Western personality, with an emphasis, Tarnas observed, on the distinctively modern theme of freedom—“freedom from the chains of the past, freedom from political and social tyranny, freedom from determinism and fate, freedom from social and religious authority, and increasing freedom from nature.”¹² Ironically, in its conservative return to Judaism, the

⁷ Ibid., 224.

⁸ Albert Camus, *The Rebel: An Essay in Revolt* (New York: Vintage, 1991). In this important philosophical work, Nobel laureate and existentialist thinker Camus traced this rebellious spirit to its philosophical origins and consequences, from the metaphysical revolt in the theories of the Marquis de Sade (1740-1814) to its culmination in historical revolutions and the emergence of the modern nationalistic State as irrational (Nazism) and rational (Soviet communism) forms of terror.

⁹ Tarnas, 228.

¹⁰ Ibid., 231.

¹¹ Ibid., 234.

¹² Ibid. This represents a major point of controversy in the current dialogue between modern and post-modern scholars. I locate Tarnas’s position along this continuum as part of the discourse previously marginalized by the inherited thrust of 19-20th century biases characteristic of secular humanist culture and its anti-religious, epistemological prejudices. Both

Reformation was characteristic of a much larger collective, secularizing metamorphosis. This opened the way, Tarnas suggested, to “religious pluralism, religious skepticism, and the complete breakdown in the until then relatively homogenous Christian world view.”¹³

The Reformation, influenced by scholastic William of Ockham’s (c. 1288-1348) nominalism, also completed the process of disenchantment of the world begun with Christianity’s “destruction of pagan animism,” paving the way for an increasingly naturalistic view of the universe, purging Greek notions of nature permeated with Divine rationality and final causes and “supporting the development of a new science of nature.”¹⁴ By disenchanting the “world of immanent divinity,” the Reformation laid the groundwork for the Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment, as Nicolaus Copernicus challenged the Ptolemaic paradigm of the cosmos with a new heliocentric model of the universe that replaced the problematic, Earth-centric paradigm of Christian theology: “With the Copernican theory, Catholicism’s long-held tension between reason and faith had finally snapped.”¹⁵ Consequently, Copernicus’s scientific theories dethroned the long-held Christian worldview that dominated Western thought throughout the Middle Ages.

The Modern Western Mind

Here, for the sake of brevity, we must fast-forward, leaping past the pioneering discoveries of mathematicians like Johannes Kepler (1571-

Tarnas and I are part of a previously marginalized counter-cultural movement currently ascendant worldwide. This emergent counter-cultural lens is psychologically informed and culturally transformative. This transformative movement is rooted in the humanistic-depth psychologies of William James in America and Carl G. Jung in Europe, among others. Humanistic-transpersonal psychology, descending from James, and depth psychology of the Jungian variant, provide a basis in the contemporary science of psychology for a qualitative understanding of the human *psyche* sympathetic to anomalous experiences, like those reported by spiritual mystics of various religious traditions. Such phenomena, previously dismissed and pathologized by modern science, transcend secular, materialistic empirical and exclusively quantitative methods of measurement and study. In short, both James and Jung offer theoretical bases in Western science compatible with religious epistemologies and spiritual experiences and, consequently are making room within both academia and popular culture for emergent post-modern, post-secular conversations and re-evaluations of both the humanities and social sciences.

¹³ Ibid.,

¹⁴ Ibid., 241.

¹⁵ Ibid., 254.

1630), Galileo Galilei (1564-1642), and Sir Isaac Newton (1642-1727) and the Scientific Revolution they helped midwife, as well as a parallel philosophical revolution led by Francis Bacon (1561-1626) and Rene Descartes (1596-1650) to the birth of modernity, that is, the modern mind. In his chapter on “Foundations of the Western Mind,” Tarnas succinctly summarizes the transition during the 15th to 17th centuries from which the major characteristics of a newly self-conscious and autonomous human being emerged. This historically novel personality type, said Tarnas, was curious about the world, confident in his own judgments, skeptical of orthodoxies, rebellious against authority, “responsible for his own beliefs and actions...proud of his humanity, conscious of his distinctness from nature, aware of his artistic powers...assured of his intellectual capacity to comprehend and control nature, and...less dependent on an omnipotent God.”¹⁶

Characteristics of Modernity

“The modern mind,” Tarnas observed, “continued to disengage itself from the medieval matrix,” and the modern outlook positioned itself along a broad continuum of epistemologies, from a “minimally affected childlike religious faith” to an “uncompromisingly tough-minded secular skepticism.”¹⁷ Tarnas discussed eight major characteristics of this emerging modernity that characterize the transition in Western thought from the medieval religious world to the early modern secular world.

Tarnas acknowledged that his summary description of the major currents that shape the modern mind and worldview that follows is merely a synopsis. As in all eras, alternative and important intellectual tendencies “exist alongside of, and often ran counter to, the dominant character of the Western mind forged during the Enlightenment.”¹⁸ With this qualification in mind, Tarnas discussed several distinctive characteristics of the emerging modern Western mind. The first of these distinctive features of modernity is succinctly summarized by Tarnas:

¹⁶ Ibid., 282.

¹⁷ Ibid., 284-285.

¹⁸ Ibid., 290.

In contrast to the medieval Christian cosmos, *which was not only created but continuously and directly governed by a personal and actively omnipotent God* [emphasis added], the Modern universe was an impersonal phenomenon, governed by regular natural laws, and understandable in exclusively physical and mathematical terms.¹⁹

According to Tarnas, the modern cosmos stands on its own, with its “own greater ontological reality,” in contrast to the medieval cosmos contingent on a God who created the material universe and its immutable laws. For the modern mind, following the Enlightenment and Scientific Revolution, the natural world became increasingly viewed as a consequence of “innate mechanical regularities” generated by nature devoid of divinity and higher purpose. To the mind of the medieval Christian, the world was incomprehensible without divine revelation, being ultimately grounded in the supernatural and metaphysical reality behind the natural cosmos. For the modern mind, this order was completely natural, and the rational powers of the mind were sufficient for comprehending the natural order of the objective world.

A second and related characteristic of modern thought was the inversion of the dualistic Christian privileging of the “supremacy of the spiritual and transcendent over the material and concrete.”²⁰ The otherworldly focus characteristic of medieval thought gave way to an active embrace of life in this world, establishing mundane existence as the central stage for the human drama. “Human aspiration,” said Tarnas, “was now increasingly centered on secular fulfillment” as the Christian dualism between God and the world was replaced by the dualisms of “mind and matter, man and cosmos,” that is, a “subjective and personal human consciousness versus an objective and impersonal material world.”²¹

Coincident with these developments, “science replaced religion as preeminent intellectual authority, as definer, judge, and guardian of the cultural world view.”²² The old philosophical debate between faith and

¹⁹ Ibid., 285.

²⁰ Ibid., 285-286.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid., 286.

reason was finally severed as human reason and empirical observation replaced scriptural revelation and theological doctrine as the principal means for understanding the world. Any conception of the world involving transcendent realities became increasingly discarded as psychological projections, life-impoverishing illusions, or as meaningless and irrelevant superstitions. Rationalism and empiricism—the two bases of modern epistemology, according to Tarnas—eventually developed their respective metaphysical consequences, Tarnas observed, in the narratives of secular humanism and scientific materialism.

A fourth characteristic emerged in contrast to the outlook of classical Greece, which understood the world as a natural order, Tarnas indicated, shared simultaneously by both the human mind and nature. While the modern view posited a universe possessed of an intrinsic order, this order no longer stemmed from a cosmic intelligence in which the human mind participates, but an order “empirically derived from nature’s material patterning by means of the human mind’s own resources.”²³ In brief, the modern world order was not a “transcendent and unitary order informing both inner mind and outer world;” rather, the two realms were held distinct with the resultant privileging of the human mind as “separate from and superior to the rest of nature.”²⁴ The universe was basically unconscious, said Tarnas, no longer imbued with purpose or conscious intelligence, now thought to be an exclusively human capacity. “The rationally empowered capacity to manipulate impersonal forces and material objects in nature became,” wrote Tarnas, “the paradigm of the human relationship to the world.”²⁵

Also, in contrast to the Greeks, a fifth characteristic of the modern mind claimed that the “order of the modern cosmos was now comprehensible in principle by humanity’s rational and empirical faculties alone.”²⁶ Knowledge of the world, Tarnas observed, became a matter for “sober impersonal scientific investigation” for purposes of intellectual mastery and material progress, as other important aspects of human

²³ Ibid., 286-87.

²⁴ Ibid., 287.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

nature—aesthetic, ethical, emotional, imaginative, etc.—were marginalized as generally irrelevant to an objective understanding of the world.

In contrast to the cosmologies of both the ancient classical and medieval periods, modern cosmology posited a planetary Earth in a neutral infinite space, with a complete elimination of the traditional celestial-terrestrial dichotomy. This sixth characteristic of modernity, said Tarnas, severed the ancient relationship between astronomy and astrology as the celestial bodies of the universe lost symbolic significance, no longer existing to light humanity's way, in contrast to both the ancient and medieval conceptions. The end of the geocentric cosmos gave rise to the mechanistic model in which the heavens were moved by the same mechanical forces as Earth, becoming merely material entities whose motions had no special relation either to human or divine reality. The universe became impersonal rather than personal, governed by natural rather than supernatural laws. The physical world, in contrast to the views of the ancients, was no longer "geocentric, finite, and hierarchical" but opaque and material, hardly the "visible expression of spiritual realities" now viewed critically as the "effect of primitive suspicion and wishful thinking."²⁷

The seventh salient characteristic of the modern mind consisted of the consequences of Darwin's theories, as the theory of evolution and mutability of species, and its effects in other fields, transformed understanding of the nature and origins of humanity, now understood as attributes of empirically observable natural processes. The Darwinian revolution did for time what Newton's ideas had previously done for space, establishing the "new structure and extent of nature's temporal dimension—both its great duration and its being the stage for qualitative transformations in nature...As the Earth had been removed from the center of creation to become another planet," Tarnas observed, "so now was man removed from the center of creation to become another animal."²⁸ Darwin's theories simultaneously vindicated the intellectual impulse established with the Scientific Revolution and broke from that model. According to Tarnas:

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., 288.

Evolutionary theory provoked a fundamental shift away from the regular, orderly, predictable harmony of the Cartesian-Newtonian world, in recognition of nature's ceaseless and indeterminate change, struggle, and development. In doing so, Darwinism furthered the Scientific Revolution's secularizing consequences and vitiated that revolution's compromise with the traditional Judaeo-Christian perspective...It was now less certain that man came from God than that he came from lower forms of primates. The human mind was not a divine endowment but a biological tool. The structure and movement of nature was the result not of God's benevolent design and purpose, but of an amoral, random, and brutal struggle for survival in which success went not to the virtuous but to the fit. Nature itself, not God or a transcendental Intellect, was now the origin of nature's permutations.²⁹

This resulted in the receding of the "last cosmological compromise between Christian revelation and modern science" as "virtually everything in the empirical world became explicable without resort to a divine reality." "The modern universe," Tarnas concluded, "was now an entirely secular phenomenon" and with Nature as the sole source of evolutionary direction, and humankind the "only rational conscious being in nature," humanity's future "lay emphatically" in the hands of humanity itself.³⁰

As a general outcome of these key developments, modern humanity's intellectual, psychological, and spiritual independence was affirmed and, with this affirmation, all institutional inhibitions to existential autonomy and individual self-expression gave way. According to Tarnas, it became the aim and purpose of modern humanity to align nature with human will, in contrast to the medieval view that the purpose of knowledge was to better serve God's will. The Christian notion of the redemption of humanity based on the historical manifestation of Jesus Christ gave way to the widespread belief that natural reason and scientific advancements were entirely sufficient to eventually achieve a secular

²⁹ Ibid., 288-289.

³⁰ Ibid., 289.

utopianism “marked by peace, rational wisdom, material prosperity, and human dominion over nature.”³¹

Accordingly, these major characteristics of modernity, Tarnas concluded, cumulatively resulted in what he called “Triumph of Secularism.” Scholar Fr. Edward Krasevac, in a course on Tarnas’s *Passion*, succinctly amplified Tarnas’s views on secularism, briefly paraphrasing Charles Taylor’s important characteristics of secularity as a way of bridging Tarnas’s largely academic history of Western thought to everyday events in the lives of post-modern individuals:

As we function within various spheres of activity—cultural, economic, educational, political, professional, recreational, scientific, technological—the norms and principles we follow, and the deliberations we engage in, don’t generally direct us to God or to any religious beliefs. Rather, the considerations we act upon are internal to the rationality of each sphere, and hence possess their own legitimate autonomy.³²

As previously suggested, history trends increasingly towards the overarching thematic value of freedom, creating the “greatest possible freedom from man—from nature, from oppressive political, social or economic structures; from restrictive metaphysical or religious beliefs; from the Church; from the Judaeo-Christian God; from the static and finite Aristotelian-Christian cosmos.”³³ The modern character brought about by this transformation left much tradition behind in favor of the “autonomous human intellect” and

reflected...a radical shift of psychological allegiance from God to man, from dependence to independence, from otherworldliness to the world, from the transcendent to the empirical, from myth and belief to reason and fact, from

³¹ Ibid., 290.

³² Edward Krasevac, “Eras and Their Dates,” Graduate Course (Berkeley, CA: Graduate Theological Union, Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology). Also see Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007).

³³ Tarnas, 290.

universals to particulars, from...a falling humanity to an advancing one.³⁴

Characteristics of Post-Modernity

Many of the characteristics of modernity described above—secularism, individualism, rebellion, skepticism, and others—continue to develop during the contemporary period in which mainstream scholarship has distinguished from later modernity a distinctly post-modern sensibility arising, more or less, in the 1970s. This still emerging phenomenon was highly influenced by the earlier decentering critical philosophies of Immanuel Kant and Friedrich Nietzsche. Kant laid the philosophical groundwork with his counter to the skeptical empiricism of Hume, demonstrating that the noumenon (i.e., nature of ultimate reality) is ultimately unknowable, that human experience is created by the cognitive structures of the mind. Tarnas summarized Kant's "epoch-making conclusion:"

All human cognition of the world is channeled through the human mind's categories. The necessity and certainty of scientific knowledge derives from the mind, and are embedded in the mind's perception and understanding of the world. They do not derive from nature independent of the mind, which in fact can never be known in itself. What man knows is a world permeated by his knowledge, and causality and the necessary laws of science are built into the framework of his cognition. Observations alone do not give man certain laws; rather, those laws reflect the laws of man's mental organization. *In the act of human cognition, the mind does not conform to things; rather, things conform to the mind* [emphasis added].³⁵

Building on Kant, Nietzsche's critique of the positivism of Locke and Hume³⁶ was radically interpretivist, opening the way for philosophical pluralism.

³⁴ Ibid., 319.

³⁵ Ibid., 343.

³⁶ Nietzsche descended into madness while deconstructing the history of inherited Western truth-claims, philosophically midwifing post-modernity. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*

Nietzsche asserted that truth based on so-called facts was merely interpretation, to be created rather than measured and proved.³⁷

This new philosophical sensibility also resulted in newly emerging paradigms in the sciences of physics and cosmology—for example, in the radical scientific discoveries of Albert Einstein, Neils Bohr, Werner Heisenberg, Karl Popper, and Thomas Kuhn.³⁸ This transformation attended similar transformations in the social sciences profoundly altered by the critical theories of Darwin, Marx, and Freud. To the latter criticisms must be added the influential and distinctively post-modernist critical theories of post-structuralist and deconstructionist thinkers that have collectively exerted a profound influence in both the social sciences and humanities.³⁹ As a cumulative influence, post-modernity added to the above-described character of the modern mind the characteristics of extreme epistemological critical uncertainty and indeterminism, with the phenomena of self and world perceived through increasingly relativistic, pluralistic, perspectival, and interpretivist lenses. With this emerging pluralism of interpretive perspectives, the critical notion that reality is a historically based, social construct gained increasing authority. “Reality is in some sense constructed by the mind,” indicated Tarnas, alluding to Kant and Nietzsche, “not simply perceived by it, and many such constructions are possible, none necessarily sovereign.”⁴⁰

Tarnas acknowledged the paradox that runs through the period. On one hand, the secularization of Western culture offered scores of benefits and empowerments of the human condition, including giving voice to the previously marginalized and voiceless, for example, gender, racial, and ethnic minorities. On the other hand, it did so at the cost of widespread existential alienation and the loss of metaphysical perspectives that

(New York: Penguin, 1971), originally written between 1883-91, Nietzsche’s tragic hero Zarathustra proclaimed that God is dead in the hearts of his contemporaries.

³⁷ Tarnas, 270. Also see Ronald L. Boyer, “On Romanticism in Jung’s Psychology: A Reflection on Richard Tarnas’s *The Passion of the Western Mind*,” *Depth Insights: Seeing the World with Soul* 10 (Fall 2017).

³⁸ Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).

³⁹ The most influential post-modern deconstructionists include Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Jean-Francois Lyotard and Jacques Lacan, among others.

⁴⁰ Tarnas, 396.

formerly gave meaning and purpose. As Pulitzer-prize winning anthropologist Ernest Becker⁴¹ suggested, life became increasingly alien and unbearable, lacking a transcendent anchor of meaning, giving rise to the widespread spiritual malaise that characterizes late modernity according to existentialist thought. To a large extent, the spiritual dignity of humanity was forfeit.⁴² Turning the scientific approach on human nature itself, Freud revealed humanity as a species in conflict with itself, as the Oedipal unconscious dethroned human reason.⁴³ Darwin revealed that humans are basically animals after all, and Marx revealed class struggle and the oppression of the masses as the *modus operandi* of history. Out of these critical analyses of human culture and history, including the entire patriarchal and largely European tradition of human knowledge stretching from the ancient Greeks to modernity, a hermeneutics of suspicion emerged, an interpretive perspective inspired by Darwin, Marx, and Freud and rooted in obsession with fragments and particulars rather than wholes and so-called universals.⁴⁴

In this increasingly fragmentary cultural and intellectual milieu, Tarnas concluded that no dominant *Weltanschauung* is any longer possible, being replaced by a myriad of interpretive perspectives freed from absolute conceptions of truth and reality favored by traditional authorities and institutions. “Properly speaking,” Tarnas suggested, “there is no post-modern worldview, nor the possibility of one. The postmodern paradigm is by its nature fundamentally subversive of all paradigms, for at its core is the awareness of reality as being at once multiple, local and temporal, and without demonstrable foundation.”⁴⁵ In contrast to formerly dominant and unitary world-views, post-modern criticism, which crosses over many

⁴¹ Ernest Becker, *Escape from Evil* (New York: Free Press, 1975).

⁴² Becker makes this important point of existentialist thought. A consequence of Camus’s “metaphysical rebellion” in freeing humanity from a dependency on an immoral deity, judged by human ethical standards, was the crushing sense of aloneness in the Universe with no parental deity on whom we can depend for either meaning and identity or salvation.

⁴³ Freud indicated the importance of the unconscious and irrational in human affairs and revealed deep-seated conflicts in the modern human *psyche*.

⁴⁴ See Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1970) and Alison Scott-Bowmann, *Ricoeur and the Hermeneutics of Suspicion: Continuum Studies in Continental Philosophy* (New York and London: Continuum International, 2009).

⁴⁵ Tarnas, 401.

traditional academic disciplines, attended to marginal voices previously oppressed by unitary and absolutist patriarchal traditions.

“Reflecting and supporting all these developments,” Tarnas observed, “is a radical perspectivism that lies at the very heart of the postmodern sensibility.”⁴⁶ This perspectival pluralism, rooted in the epistemologies of Kant, Nietzsche, and others, and “later articulated in pragmatism, hermeneutics, and poststructuralism,” led to a view in which the world cannot be said to possess “any features in principle prior to interpretation.” “All human knowledge,” Tarnas asserted,

is mediated by signs and symbols of uncertain provenance, constituted by historically and culturally variable predispositions, and influenced by often unconscious human interests. Hence the nature of truth and reality, in science no less than in philosophy, religion, or art, is *radically ambiguous* [emphasis added].⁴⁷

“Of the many factors that have converged to produce this intellectual position,” Tarnas continued, “it has been the analysis of language that has brought forth the most radically skeptical epistemological currents in the postmodern mind, and it is these currents that have identified themselves most articulately and self-consciously as ‘post-modern.’”⁴⁸ Increasingly, Tarnas asserted, language itself came to be viewed as uncertain and ultimately meaningless in any universal sense, reduced to limited binary manifestations and conveyors of merely local-temporal meanings.

This bias against all forms of structuralism and universalism (i.e., totalistic views in any form) resulted, to give one example, in the post-modern criticism of Carl Jung’s psychological theory of the archetypes and of the privileging by Jung of psychological meanings found in certain symbols the world over. As Tarnas suggested, following Kuhn’s criticism of scientific paradigms, the importance of a relativistic contextual understanding of truth-claims embedded in history and culture emerged,

⁴⁶ Ibid., 397.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 398–400.

with consequential cultural-historical bias a given.⁴⁹ With this development, an important critique of traditional political agendas of oppression and a movement towards decolonization also emerged.

The skeptical spirit of post-modern criticism regards the hidden power agendas underlying the entire patriarchal tradition of Euro-American Western thought as suspect—from modern scientific claims back to the theologically Christian-dominated worldview, and further back to the roots of Western philosophy in the classicism of the ancient Greeks. By emphasizing voices historically marginalized by Euro-American colonial powers, the skeptical deconstructionist spirit of post-modernity contributes significantly to the age-old quest for understanding reality, now increasingly viewed as relative to cultural-historical contexts and perspectives. This development is reminiscent of the proto-typical deconstructionist approach of Socrates (in the 5th century B.C.) that exposed the false logic of his contemporaries, opening up new perspectives permitting constructive yet radical reformulations of important philosophical ideas about knowledge and truth. This deconstructive critical legacy continues today, interrogating the entire Western patriarchal tradition, creating conditions requiring what Tarnas—as a depth psychologist—views as a cultural counterpoint needed to compensate for the destructive elements (e.g., alienation) of post-modern thought: the need for a new synthesis and integration of the whole person and society that restores human dignity and transcendent meaning to human life.

Concluding Discussion

One of the most important effects of this deconstructionist spirit, from this author's perspective (shared with Tarnas), is the opening of new possibilities of understanding, for example, a resurgence of discarded ancient systems of religion. In a world in which so-called Judeo-Christian traditions remain dominant but no longer authoritatively exclusive in the landscape of Western religious traditions, the path has become more open

⁴⁹ Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (University of Chicago Press, 2012). According to Kuhn, paradigms are models of reality that are self-revealing within the disciplinary community inclined to a particular model but equally obscure and inaccessible to anyone outside of a particular school of thought.

for spiritual and religious pluralism.⁵⁰ For example, Indigenous wisdom (e.g., shamanism) and the ancient, perennial wisdom-traditions of Eastern mysticism are currently ascendant in the West. Similarly, the somewhat marginal theories of Jung's⁵¹ archetypal perspective and approach to an integration of the conscious and unconscious personality stands side-by-side in uneasy alliance with deconstructionist theories of radical particularity and uncertainty, such as the feminist critique, broadly defined, in all domains of patriarchal agenda, privilege, and power.⁵²

As Tarnas notes throughout *Passion*, the historical march of influential ideas shaping previous unitary worldviews is slow and complex, and in a state of continuous transformation and development. The end of a single historically dominant worldview—for example, the transformation from Greek classicism to medieval Christian theological conceptions of the world—does not suggest that certain previously held ideas no longer have currency, but rather these age-old debates surface and resurface time and again in new and unanticipated forms. As modern/post-modern individuals living in a society largely framed by and constructed out of these salient features of modern thought—that is, a consensual general outlook positioned along a broad continuum of epistemologies, from a “minimally affected childlike religious faith” to an “uncompromisingly tough-minded secular skepticism”—post-modern people are adrift in this ideational confusion of ancient traditions and modernity.⁵³ To this stew of contesting ideas now must be added the historically recent and still emerging post-modern dialogue emphasizing critical interpretive uncertainty, perspectival

⁵⁰ As European and American cultures have become more diverse in post-modernity, this racial, national, and ethnic diversity has manifested in increasingly interfaith representation of religious ideas. This phenomenon is itself a result of post-modern criticism of inherited truth-claims, making space for the legitimacy of Buddhist, Hindu, and similar indigenous religious traditions historically oppressed by colonial prejudices.

⁵¹ “Marginal” when viewed from the general contemporary perspective of the mainstream Academy in the United States. Jung’s views are highly respected in parts of Europe, and Jungian psychological criticism continues to emerge as an important perspective in the social sciences and humanities in the States as well. See Susan Rowland, *C. G. Jung in the Humanities: Taking the Soul’s Path* (New Orleans: Spring Books, 2010).

⁵² Tarnas concluded his book with an Epilogue (441-445) emphasizing the important contributions to Western thought resulting from the relatively recent ascendancy of the “repressed feminine” and the feminist perspective across disciplines.

⁵³ Tarnas, 441-445.

context, moral relativism, emphasis on particularity, and militant (and at times irreverent) suspicion of all inherited claims to universal truths.

Importantly, Tarnas's brief history of Western thought, from the ancient Greeks to post-modernity, has vital implications and relevance far beyond the Academy: these transformative ideas rooted in modernity and post-modern criticism are reflected in our ordinary, contemporary, everyday lives and personal and culturally pluralistic interpretations of both individual and collective experiences. In his course on philosophy based on Tarnas's book of the same title, philosopher and theologian Krasevac brings this personal relevance home. He illustrated the complex nature of this collective, contemporary situation with a personal anecdote offered from the perspective of a modern and post-modern individual who is also a person of faith, indicating in his classroom discourse on *Passion* that he sees himself as a product of these competing and often conflicting worldviews and evolving perspectives of modernity and post-modernity. As a conservative, Catholic theologian, Krasevac believes in the Catholic theological conception of God and practice of faith; but as a modern individual, when he witnesses someone suffering an epileptic bout, Krasevac "sends for the ambulance rather than the exorcist."⁵⁴

It can and perhaps must be argued that every modern/post-modern individual may indeed benefit from a similar degree of self-awareness as Krasevac demonstrates regarding the greater ideational currents in which he (albeit largely unconsciously) and his fellow contemporaries strive to make coherent such apparently contrary and seemingly irreconcilable views of reality. However, such discernment as Krasevac demonstrates is relatively uncommon and even perhaps unnecessary. Krasevac is not only a modern/post-modern individual; he is also a modern/post-modern scholar, professor, and interpreter of theological and philosophical ideas and consequently serves as a model for presumed readers of this article. For contemporary interdisciplinary scholars like Krasevac and Tarnas, aspiring to develop and advance theoretical perspectives and methodological practices capable of being taken seriously within the current maelstrom of critical perspectives and uncertainties of post-

⁵⁴ Krasevac, Graduate Course.

modern dialogue, a deliberate taking into account of the profound influence of modern and post-modern thought—as well as the ancient and medieval historical contexts out of which these perspectives took shape—seems indispensable as a principle of intellectual honesty. This seems particularly important today, given the spirited and complex nature of the multi-perspectival contemporary dialogue now taking place concerning the nature of reality and the human capacity for knowledge and understanding. This imperative seems particularly relevant for serious students of the social sciences (psychology, anthropology, folkloristics, etc.) and humanities (art, classics, history, religion, literature, philosophy, etc.), where the potent themes issuing from a post-modern hermeneutics of suspicion are currently in edgy, critical conversations with both Western and Eastern forms of received knowledge concerning the nature of reality.

Conclusion

The distinctly modern, Western personality that emerged from the historical transformations of the Renaissance, Reformation, and Enlightenment can be generally characterized as secular humanist and scientifically materialist, with a central theme of intellectual and spiritual emancipation from the inherited truth-claims of medieval Christian theology and ancient Greek classicism. This transformation from supernatural-metaphysical models of the world to human-centric secularism was driven by a dominant and unitary epistemology, a positivist ideology privileging faith in rationalism, empiricism, and scientific materialism to secure humanity's progressively utopian future.

To this foundational modern, secular humanist epistemology, the historically recent emergence of a late-modern or post-modern mind must be added. The post-modern outlook takes the modern attitude of skepticism and interpretive suspicion to extremes, rejecting universalism of any kind, including metanarratives, ideologies, and grand theories of absolute truth, objective reality, or even human nature. This emergent critical perspective prefers the view that received truths and even knowledge itself are merely contextual products or constructs of historically based, socio-cultural and political interpretations. Post-modernity can be further generally characterized by its attitudes of

interpretive suspicion and ambiguity, epistemological and moral relativism and pluralism, irreverence for traditional authorities, distrust and rejection of grand theories and ideologies, obsession with fragments and particulars, and consequential privileging of marginal voices and perspectives—among other salient features.

These identifiable features of contemporary thought (i.e., the modern and post-modern mind) seem highly relevant both within the cross-disciplinary Academy and beyond, expressed in many aspects of our everyday lives and experiences, including contemporary cultural and political chaos and confusion. These messy conversations create conditions requiring not only challenging acts of personal integration of seemingly disparate personal thoughts about the nature of reality but seem to include increasingly passionate and often vitriolic debates in the public sphere about the pluralistic, multi-perspectival nature of reality. This confusion about reality and truth manifests outwardly and collectively, for one potent example, in the form of so called “culture wars” and an increasingly polarized and unhinged political culture that might be fairly characterized as a feud based on distinctively alternate realities (“alternative facts”) in which we, as a society, are collectively immersed.

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