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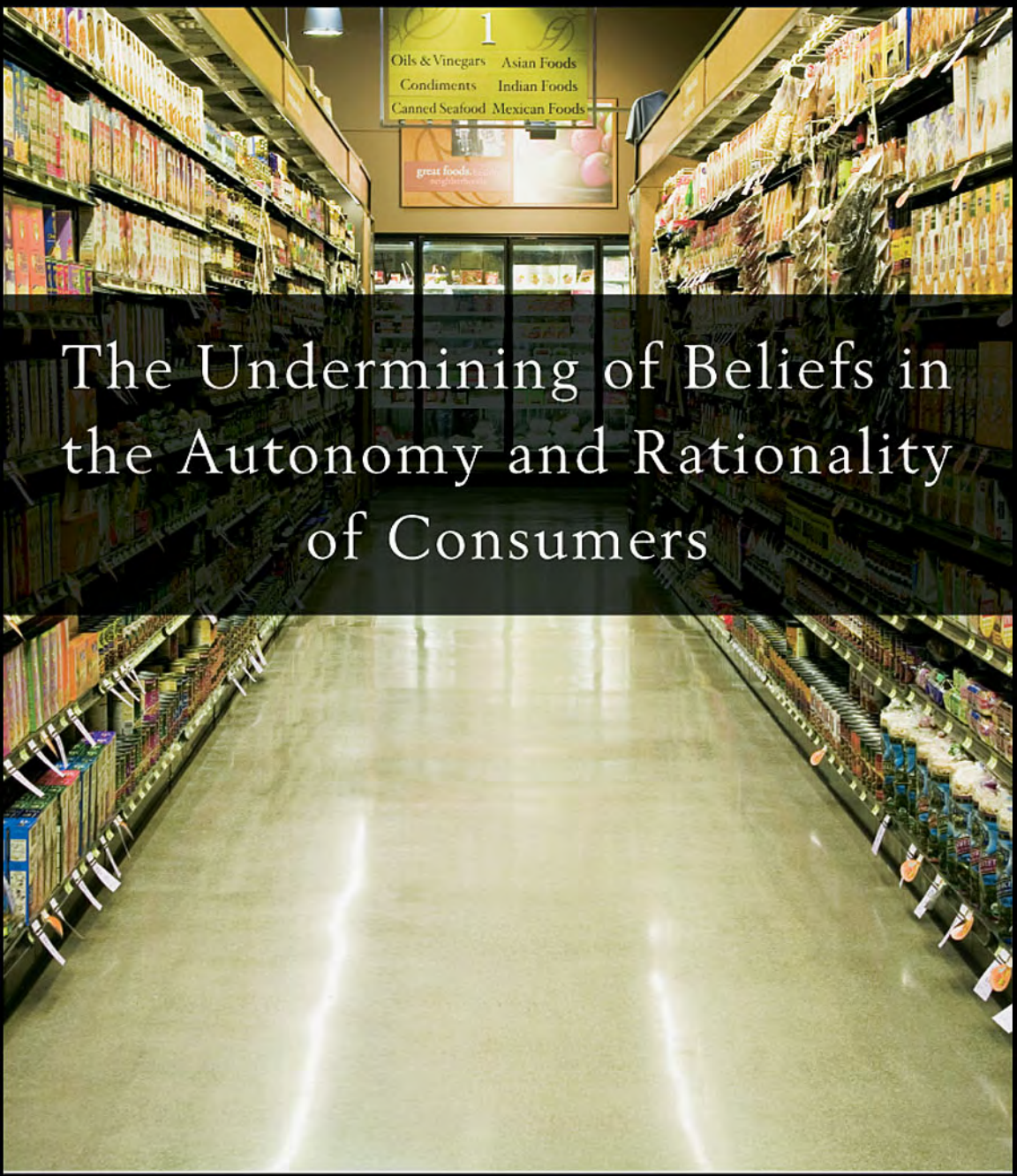

The Undermining of Beliefs in the Autonomy and Rationality of Consumers

John O'Shaughnessy and Nicholas Jackson O'Shaughnessy

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This book examines modern consumption, focusing on concepts of autonomy and rationality. In recent years, conventional ideas of 'free will' have come under attack in the context of consumer choice and similarly, postmodernists have sabotaged the very notion of consumer rationality. O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy adopt a moderating perspective, reviewing and critiquing these attacks in order to work towards a more nuanced view of the consumer: neither entirely autonomous nor perfectly rational.

While the first part of this book concentrates on assailing critiques of 'free will', the second part takes issue with the postmodernist emphasis on the non-rational. The authors situate these critiques in the context of key academic debate, examining the logic and empirical bases for their claims thus leading to a deeper understanding of 'bounded' rationality and the potential of the adaptive unconscious to affect consumer choice.

This book is a distinctive contribution to the debates surrounding consumerism and will be of great interest to graduate students and researchers engaged with marketing, consumer choice, and consumer psychology. It will also be of interest to those working in advertising and market research.

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Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2008
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada
by Routledge
270 Madison Ave, New York, NY 10016

This edition published in the Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2007.

"To purchase your own copy of this or any of Taylor & Francis or Routledge's collection of thousands of eBooks please go to www.eBookstore.tandf.co.uk."

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group,
an informa business

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
O'Shaughnessy, John.
The undermining of beliefs in the autonomy and rationality of consumers / John O'Shaughnessy and Nicholas Jackson O'Shaughnessy.
p.cm.—(Routledge interpretive marketing research ; 6)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
1. Consumers' preferences. 2. Consumer behavior. 3. Consumers—Research. 4. Marketing—Psychological aspects. I. O'Shaughnessy, Nicholas J., 1954– II. Title.

HF5415.32.O745 2007
658.8'342—dc22 2007020944

ISBN 0-203-93583-7 Master e-book ISBN

ISBN10: 0–415–77323–7 (hbk)
ISBN10: 0–203–93583–7 (ebk)

ISBN13: 978–0–415–77323–2 (hbk)
ISBN13: 978–0–203–93583–5 (ebk)

For Morris Holbrook, colleague, mentor, and friend

Contents

Preface

How much autonomy does the consumer have over the actions she takes and her behavior generally? We all assume she has 'free will' to do whatever she wants providing she has what it takes by way of ability and resources. We certainly do not think of her, or people generally, being driven by unconscious forces over which an individual has no control even if admitting our behavior can be influenced (though not determined) by unconscious events. But this view of ourselves has always been under attack with the attacks having intensified in recent years. Not surprisingly we also find the claim of man being a rational animal (once considered something that distinguishes man from other animals) is being assailed with postmodernists undermining the very notion of rationality altogether.

This book rebuts these attacks, accepting the traditional view that the consumer and people generally are neither entirely autonomous nor perfectly rational. It is this non-absoluteness of either autonomy or rationality that makes the consumer a subject of interest. For to speak of 'complete autonomy' for the individual implies, at the extreme, a degree of freedom to act without reference to other than a person's own wants and beliefs. Even ignoring the social norms that bind us and the limits on resources, and abilities, we are so constrained by unconscious happenings that we do not fully control and only vaguely understand. As to rationality, the actions of the consumer may be intelligible but at the same time the creation of a flawed rather than perfect rationality. Yet the economist and many marketing academics proceed as if high rationality were the norm while the political left have never seen the consumer as having much autonomy, but as the plaything of big business, with the consumer either brainwashed or brain dead. What we assail in Part I of the book is the harsh verdict that whatever we do is not the product of free will or, alternatively, it is so constrained by unconscious forces that it leaves little room for maneuver. In Part II, we respond to those who see the consumer as being non-rational, as do those subscribing to the postmodernist perspective. A flawed rationality is not the same as being generally non-rational as our beliefs, as a matter of survival, track how the world is, even if we are often misled or act impulsively.

There is a conceptual link between the concepts of autonomy and rationality. If the consumer has no autonomy there is no place for rationality since rationality assumes the capacity to evaluate alternatives, consider consequences, and make choices which only makes sense on the assumption of some degree of autonomy. Autonomy is a necessary condition for the exercise of rationality and rationality acts within the constraints of the autonomy we possess. Thus we cannot be rational, and have no autonomy. We can, however, be autonomous but fail to be rational: rationality is not inherent to having autonomy. We identify these as the twin parameters of modern consumption, neither fully autonomous nor all-rational, and in so doing go along with those who challenge those who bestow absolute or no autonomy on the consumer and credit her as either following the normative principles of rationality or just acting on gut feel. Assuming absolute autonomy or no autonomy, or absolute rationality or no rationality makes it easier to think about what this implies in terms of human behavior, but in so doing it sacrifices reality for intellectual rigor.

What we have done in this little monograph is bring together the harshest critics of our autonomy and rationality and examine the logic and the empirical bases for their claims. We have found them wanting, but in countering their arguments we believe we come to have a deeper understanding of "bounded" (to use Herbert Simon's felicitous term) rationality and the potential of the (adaptive) unconscious to affect consumer choices and deliberations.

The search for some kind of comprehensive, fixed overall image of the consumer is elusive when such a creature is not entirely autonomous, nor entirely rational. Consumers, like people generally, are subject to the influence of unacknowledged prejudices, the resurrection of past feelings or the mind's buried default programs, or emotions inexplicably triggered by images and symbols; the operation of early indoctrination, long forgotten memories; the governance of the mind via learned or socially acquired attitudes, or the way the mind processes and assimilates particular kinds of information.

The assumptions of a super-rational, autonomous consumer simplifies research, and the constructs of high autonomy and rationality are an implicit assumption in much of the literature. They substitute for more elusive notions of a vague, contradictory, and fluid consumer who is a more complex and therefore a less satisfactory object of analysis. The rational structure of bureaucratic and hierarchical institutions cope ill with fuzzy targets, and this is why the notion of absolute 'autonomy' and absolute rationality are dangerously seductive. But this does not mean we make the other error of assuming no autonomy and no rationality beyond seeking immediate gratification.

We have identified two areas, autonomy and rationality, critical to the analysis of consumption today. We claim that a more nuanced view of the consumer—as neither fully autonomous nor lacking in any autonomy, nor entirely rational nor irrational—would improve the dialogue of marketing. This monograph offers a review and critical analysis of two extreme positions: no or

negligible autonomy and slight to minimal rationality. We do not believe that our position is other than mainstream among marketing academics but defending that position against the resurrection of new and more powerful arguments advocating the opposite view, will heighten confidence and understanding of the perspective.

PART I

The renewed interest in the unconscious and free will

A progress report for marketing

Abstract: If the claims being made by some prominent experimental psychologists for the absence of free will and the dominance of the (adaptive) unconscious in human behavior have any validity, this has important implications for marketing and marketing research in that both assume consumers are free agents whose responses to inquiries reflect true beliefs and feelings. The two chapters in Part I are an evaluation of the claims being made, while acknowledging there may be no final answers at present.

1 The relegation of free choice and free will

Introduction: reasons for action as causes of action

In the 1960s psychology moved away from behaviorism with its focus on conditioning to a renewed interest in the brain as a computer; the mind being viewed as software to the brain's hardware for undertaking information processing. Not surprisingly, this has given rise to an increased interest in free will and the respective roles of the unconscious versus conscious thinking in human behavior.

We all feel we have freedom to choose, acknowledging there are cases of madness, psychosis, and compulsive-obsessive behavior where this does not apply. However, Colin Blakemore (1988) writes:

> The sense of will is an invention of the brain. Like so much of what the brain does, the feeling of choice is a mental model—a plausible account of how we act, which tells us no more about how decisions are really taken in the brain than our perception of the world tells us about the computations involved in deriving it.[1]

In a similar vein, Wegner (2002) in his book *The Illusion of Conscious Will* claims that whenever we explain our actions as arising from conscious choice processes, we are practicing "intention invention" because our actions emanate from countless causes of which we are unaware.[2] Conscious will, he argues, is just an illusion though it does have a function as a guide to understanding ourselves and developing a sense of responsibility. Wegner's position is that of the *hard determinism* which denies humans have free will: the feeling of having free will is considered an illusion though an illusion that is nonetheless valuable if we are to make sense of moral responsibility. If these claims are valid we need to think of the implications for studying the consumer since the most basic assumption is that the consumer is a free agent who makes choices on that basis.

Many, of course, contest these claims. Bennett (a neuroscientist) and Hacker (an Oxford philosopher) (2003) reject all such assertions:

> Such assertions as these—namely that human beings are machines, or that the behavior of human beings is no more than the behavior of nerve

> cells, or that decisions are taken in and (apparently) by the brain—are not science but metaphysics . . . *they are not open to scientific confirmation or disconfirmation*.[3]

A separate issue is whether reasons for action, freely or not freely chosen, are causes of action. Brown (2001), a philosopher of science, argues that philosophers today generally hold that "reasons are causes and reason explanations are causal explanations" of action (p.152).[4] And with notable exceptions, people are usually confident in knowing *the* reasons for their action even if these are not the reasons made public. But Bernard Williams (2002) is not alone in taking a very different philosophical position from Brown, arguing that a person's motivational state (defined in terms of a person's beliefs and desires) should not be conceived as evidence for a person's conviction that it makes sense for him to act in that way.[5] For Williams, a person's motivational state does not cause him to act but simply *expresses* his conviction, just as this conviction is also *expressed* in the action itself. Williams thus suggests a *conceptual* relationship between motivational state, conviction, and action, rather than a causal one. Bennett and Hacker endorse Williams's view. They argue that reason explanations work by *explaining* human action by quoting the context and the reasoning people go through. They contrast this form of explanation with neuroscience explanations that are likely to be explained by quoting the neural conditions for behavior. This means neuroscience can explain incapacitation but not normal behavior.

Fay's (1996) view on reasons as causes is more nuanced than Brown's.[6] He argues, in line with Bennett and Hacker, that reasons in themselves cannot possibly be the cause of anything as the content of thought is neither a state, nor an event, nor a process. Philosophers arguing similarly usually claim reasons are simply justifications for action. But Fay does not go this route, arguing that the *real* (causal) reasons for action must be understood to mean the *practical reasoning process* that prompted the person to act. There is a danger here in making what Fay has to say simply definitionally true, but he goes on to say that the practical reasoning processes can be quite complex and actions may result from a very mixed bag of reasons. He also agrees that the reasoning process that causes a person to act may not always be conscious or amenable to recall or even capable of verbalization.

No one doubts that a good deal of behavior is caused in the sense of being involuntary: the 'blink', as an involuntary physical movement, is something that is caused and something distinct from the 'wink' which is regarded as voluntary, and intentional. Nonetheless, all voluntary actions are not necessarily intentional in that an action, like winking, may on occasions, be a simple matter of habit. Also a consumer might voluntarily but non-intentionally read a billboard driving along the road or read the print that appears in an ad on the TV screen. There can be processes where conscious control is applied to initiating and guiding action but there are also processes where all conscious control is absent (Norman and Shallice, 1986).[7]

Bennett and Hacker speak of *volitional* categories of action: voluntary, involuntary, and non-voluntary; intentional and unintentional, deliberate or impulsive; attentive and careless. This is a much richer classification than any currently on offer in the buyer behavior field. Non-voluntary is distinguished from involuntary behavior like the automatic reflex because non-voluntary action can be the result of external pressures like adhering reluctantly to the office dress code. A *fully* voluntary action implies an action which a person controls from its inception, continuation, and termination. Actions such as the expressive gestures one makes with one's hand as one talks are voluntary without being intentional, while actions can be voluntary that throw up unintended consequences that were not intended, such as the unintended consequences of buying that leads to overdrawn credit. This is a useful conceptualization of voluntary action that might be beneficially adopted by marketing.

If the reasons are particularly compelling, the layperson talks of reasons being causes as when I say my father's death caused me to cancel my lecture. In marketing texts we speak of market conditions causing a change of plans. Aristotle himself viewed basic desires as causal forces which reason merely directed. In respect to the different views of Brown, Williams, and Fay the issue comes down to whether the relationship between reasons and corresponding action is merely logical/conceptual or causal and, if causal, in what way.

Robinson (1985) sets out three distinct claims:[8]

(i) Hard determinism which claims that for everything that ever happens at the level of observable human behavior, there are conditions such that, given them, nothing else could happen.
(ii) Hard voluntarism which claims that when a person's reasons are his own and not imposed, choices intentionally express wants and beliefs that authentically belong to the individual.
(iii) Compatibilism tries to reconcile determinism with voluntarism by claiming that actions can be caused and still appear to be freely chosen.

Wegner's position would fall under hard determinism as he views choice deliberations as simply idle chatter in the mind. We consider each of the positions:

Hard determinism

Determinism seems an uncomplicated concept but it is not that simple. Ernest Nagel (1979) defines determinism as[9]

> In the loosest relevant sense of this word, it is a label for the claim that all things, events, processes and traits come into existence, endure, or pass out of it, only under fixed and definite conditions.
>
> (p.262)

This defines hard determinism but it is not clear that this is Nagel's position when it comes to human action since he goes on to comment in a way that echoes compatibilism:

> The assumption or the discovery that our acts and choices are determined in some fashion does not mean that we are being coerced when we are engaged in deliberation and decision, nor does it mean that acts of deliberation and choice are irrelevant to what we may overtly do. But the mere absence of feelings of coercion does not itself warrant the conclusion that there are not determinants, . . .
>
> (p.268)

Hard determinism regards all wants, beliefs, decisions, and actions as caused with the causes arising from natural, physical sources: that all are subject to natural laws. Hard determinism looks to verifiable predictions as the hallmark of truth. Reasons under this view are the effects of physical events and causes of action: reasons are contained in some neural–biological schemata in the brain and in this sense are physical causes. Hard determinists tend to seek external causes of action because it lends itself to quantitative approaches while offering the possibility of identifying purely *observable* causal mechanisms to avoid assuming invisible entities like motives, attitudes, and beliefs.

John Hospers in a famous essay "What Means This Freedom" written in 1966 argued that we are all motivated by unconscious psychological forces that compel behavior.[10] We may think, he claims, we know why we acted as we did and may think we have conscious control over our actions and feel fully responsible for them but we are not. Although Hospers focuses on neurotic behavior he argues those viewed as normal are driven by unconscious drives over which they have no control. On these grounds, none of us can choose to act other than how we did so none of us has free will.

Some writers fall back on the 'genes' as the causal *source* of all basic behavior. Singer (2001), a biologist, claims *basic* behavior is controlled by genetic factors which determine what a person is able to learn.[11] Basic behaviors are dispositional, encompassing a wide variety of behaviors such as aggression, IQ, sense of well-being, alienation, and achievement. This basic behavior, he claims, is completely determined by genetic factors. As a consequence, freedom of will does not operate at the level of basic human behavior. In contrast, he argues environmentally influenced behavior is malleable behavior. And environmentally influenced behavior dominates. Human beings, unlike other animals, are less determined by their genetic makeup than by environmental influences.

If hard determinism is rejected, it does not follow that there are no explanations of behavior that are universal. There are but they are invariably truisms like saying we have a need to seek food. Flyvbjerg (2003) quotes Neitzsche in saying what is universal is often empty and banal.[12] For Flyvbjerg, the social sciences are context-dependent so we can only confidently explain

human behavior ex-post facto after identifying the relevant contextual factors. This does not necessarily undermine hard determinism but implies that contextual factors are causally determining conditions that must always be taken into account.

In sociology it is not uncommon to regard *reasons* as causes (Lazarsfeld, 1973)[13] while motivational psychologists reject the notion that beliefs and wants are just "idle chatter in the mind" but act as causes (Brody, 1983).[14] We typically see ourselves as self-monitoring, self-conscious, language users who consciously reflect on the options open to us and deliberately choose which we prefer. How does this all square with hard determinism? That we believe we can do what we want to do is what Velleman (2000), calls "epistemic freedom."[15] Velleman argues that, when we have this distinctive experience of free will, we may be experiencing nothing more than *epistemic* freedom (believing we are free), feeling of freedom perfectly compatible with determinism. When the consumer claims her choices of product are always open to her, she is confusing epistemic freedom for causal freedom. All that is open to the consumer is not what she is going to buy, but the epistemic freedom of saying what she is going to choose. The consumer confuses the license to say what brands she will choose for the possibility that her choice could equally have been any brand on the shelf. Velleman's is a clever defense of hard determinism but it is difficult to validate. Hard determinism as a thesis can neither be conclusively proved nor conclusively refuted. In science determinism is taken on board as simply the best regulative principle for guiding inquiry.

Dennett (2003), the philosopher, claims people can be completely free and morally responsible for all their actions even though every thing is determined by causes going back to genes, upbringing, and past behavior.[16] In *Freedom Evolve*, he aims to demonstrate how evolution transformed us from senseless atoms to our actions being freely chosen. His seeming compatibilism argues that we can be fully responsible for our actions even though every single action is determined by events that could have happened before we were born; in fact a completely deterministic view might even trace back "cause" in infinite regress to the beginning of time! Everything here depends on our accepting his "concept of freedom" which is not the sort of "freedom of will" that most of us have in mind. It is not the absolute freedom or absolute free will to do whatever we want to do as long as it is feasible: for Dennett there is no more to being a free agent than behaving like a free agent![17]

Frankfurt (1991) is much more persuasive in arguing that the essential difference between humans and other creatures is to be found in the structure of a person's will, defined as the ability to form what he calls "second-order-desires."[18] Generally, animals have "first-order desires" which are simply desires to do or not to do this or that but the formation of second-order desires necessitates reflective self-evaluation which only humans possess. "The consumer wants to buy a Mazda Miata." This identifies a first-order desire. In itself it does not tell us whether the desire is sufficient for it to play

a decisive role in what the consumer actually does. The consumer can want a Miata but prefer to buy something else. In fact a consumer may have a want but does not want it to move her to action in that there are reasons for forbearance (e.g. dieting) that are more pressing.

For Frankfurt the notion of "will" is the notion of *effective* desire. The consumer may *want to want* (e.g. diet foods) but this may not identify her "will" to do anything. But the consumer may in fact want to want to diet and that does pertain to what she wants her "will" to be. In this case she wants the desire to diet to be the desire that effectively moves her to act. Someone has a second-order desire when she wants simply to have a certain desire or when she wants a certain desire to be her *will*. Frankfurt calls the latter position "second-order volitions." Having such second-order volitions are part of being a person. Humans have the capacity for 'self-distance' in the sense that we can and do reflect on ourselves from the perspective of others. This reflection can lead us to yearn for beliefs and desires that are in conflict with those we have. These second-order beliefs and desires come about through reflectiveness which is a distinguishing characteristic of humans. A person's ability to reflect is the ability to take into account her own thinking and facts about herself.

When a person acts, the desire by which she is moved is either the will she wants or a will she wants to be without. What kind of freedom then is freedom of the will? Frankfurt rejects the notion that being free is simply a matter of doing what one wants to do. To deprive someone of freedom of action is not necessarily to undermine the freedom of will. A person enjoys freedom of will when she is free to want what she wants to want or, more specifically, she is free to *will* what she wants to will or to have the will she wants. *In gaining conformity of her will to her second-order volitions, she is exercising freedom of will*. Frankfurt claims this conceptualization of freedom of will appears neutral as to causal determinism as it is at least conceivable that it be causally determined that a person is free to want what she wants to want!

In marketing research, we frequently ask respondents, directly or indirectly, to tell us what they want. But Frankfurt reminds us that a statement of the form "A wants B" conveys remarkably little information. It is in fact consistent with any of the following statements (a) the prospect of having B evokes no emotion; (b) A is unaware she wants B (the want is latent and would need to be activated); (c) A believes she in fact does not want B; (d) A does not really "really" want "B" and so on. In other words, "A wants B" covers too wide a range of possibilities. In marketing "A" wants "B" is typically interpreted as "B" is what "A" wants.

On the basis that we automatically react to being burnt, Descartes (1596–1650) pointed to the mechanistic linkage between sensation and behavior to show that behavior was largely unaffected by free will but possessed mechanistic properties (Glimcher, 2003).[19] Few would choose such an example of 'mechanistic' behavior to exemplify action as opposed to involuntary behavior. The fact is that behavior resulting from a sensation like an itch

is typically involuntary. As Bennett and Hacker (2003) say, it is not uncommon in psychology, cognitive neuroscience, and philosophy to claim that perceiving entails having sensations; that sensations are essential elements in perception. This is a throwback to a view going back to the 17th century that perception is the cause of all ideas and impressions. If 'sensation' covers things like tickles, pains, and twinges and so on and perception is of qualities such as colors, sounds, smells, tastes, and things we can feel, then such perceptual qualities cannot be sensations. Sensory perception is perception through the senses, not through sensations. Just to see an object is not to have any sort of sensation; seeing, for example, the red coloring of a Coca Cola bottle is not something that happens in the brain but in the supermarket or wherever.

To have a sensation cannot be equated with perceiving something. Objects perceived exist whether perceived or not while a sensation occurs only when felt and, unlike a perception, it is as it is felt to be. There can, of course, be sensation in a perceptual organ as when our eyes are irritated but this has nothing to do with the exercise of any perceptual faculty. Sensations are internally or externally induced and typically give rise to behavior, just as an itch stimulates scratching. Skill in perception can be improved but it makes no sense to talk about acquiring skill in *feeling* sensations or even talk about them being incorrect: sensations are just as they are felt to be. And contrary to what most of us assume Bennett and Hacker point out that sensations do not involve any interpretive or inference process and neither are they the conclusions of unconscious inferences.

Bhaskar (1979), whose concern is to bring reasons into a causal framework, argues that our *real* reasons and rules of action must necessarily be causally efficacious.[20] Rosenblueth, Wiener, and Bigelow (1943) claimed that all purposeful behavior is causal on the ground that all goal-directed action is action directed by the goal-object through the mechanism of negative feedback.[21] Mechanical systems incorporating negative feedback (e.g. the thermostat) only give the appearance of purposefulness and this, it is asserted, is the same with human systems: our actions merely appear to be purposeful. But critics reply that intentional human action is not just *purposeful* action but *purposive* action. Purposive action suggests consciousness with a will to achieve whatever purposes are chosen. Action is not, as with the thermostat, controlled or determined by some goal–object but influenced by beliefs about the desirability and feasibility of attaining that goal-object (Collin, 1985).[22]

Hard voluntarism

Causality involves necessity and so is incompatible with hard voluntarism. Hard voluntarism embraces several interconnected arguments: contrasting the causal with the reason-giving explanation; viewing rational decision processes as different in kind from causal processes and claiming the absence of causal regularities in respect to human action.

Both hard determinism and hard voluntarism may agree they are talking about acting for a reason (*the* reason) or, more appropriately, the reasoning that leads to action, not just any reason that is offered to explain the action. But hard *voluntarism* rests on the assumption that the mental domain that supports wants, beliefs, choices, decisions, and intentions does not fall under causal explanation but embraces free will. It sees 'wants' as influenced by reflection, beliefs tracking truth as a matter of survival, and decision-making as a reflective process of weighing up the pros and cons of alternatives in line with wants and beliefs, with actions emerging as a result. Causal explanations are viewed as mechanical explanations showing why the event to be explained had to happen. They are appropriate, hard voluntarism says, only in explaining involuntary behavior since the objective is to find the necessary and sufficient conditions that propelled someone to do what he or she did. In contrast, voluntarism claims consumers, in taking intentional action, are not propelled to take the action. They are usually conscious of what influences them and can reflect both on these influences and the buying situation before deciding what to do. Louch (1966) claims that mental events are only causes in the trivial sense that, unless a person thought them, he would not have acted as he did.[23] Although the temporal order of antecedent mental event and consequent action is present, the link between the two is logical and conceptual and not a physical one.

Action theory in philosophy commonly subscribes to hard voluntarism: a position well articulated in Melden's *Free Action* (1961).[24] Meldon denies the legitimacy of viewing actions as composed of causally connected mental and physical events. The act of will and corresponding body action are not distinct states but are one and the same, not causally related. Human actions are to be explained by reason-giving explanations, not by causal explanation, as reasons are tied to purposive action while causes are not. The consumer's desire or want always implies an object for that desire: the desire and its object are a unity: it is in fact not logically possible to describe a choice without stating its objective. The tie between desire, belief, intention, and the so-called act of (say) buying is a logical or conceptual one and not causal. This is why analytic philosophers like Bernard Williams (2002) stress a conceptual as opposed to a causal relationship between reasons and action.

To the voluntarist, causal explanation points to the past, for example, "(X) happened because (Y) had occurred," while reason-giving explanations point to the future, for example, "this action (X) was taken *in order* to achieve (Y)." Purposive action looks to the final result to be achieved. Voluntarism views people as free agents not puppets on a string subject to the push and pull of uncontrollable stimuli. An *agent*, defined as an entity with authentic wants and beliefs, is someone able to frame plans based on considering various action-consequence sequences. This is not to regard all behavior as intended. Voluntarism accepts that there are reflex-like habits and gut reactions that may come under the causal framework.

Hard voluntarism underwrites the notion of freedom of choice and action. Voluntarism accepts, however, that agents do not have complete freedom in that they operate within contextual constraints. But the *acceptance* of constraints (unless the constraints are imposed and coercive) results from a rational assessment of their significance. Rationally weighing up the pros and cons may be a rule-following process but it is not a causal one. Of course, people carrying out their plans take account, where necessary, of the causal laws of nature while much of their behavior might be automatic in following set routines. Kagan (1989) in fact views people as mainly on "automatic pilot," being roused into conscious deliberation only when some problem or concern surfaces.[25] Following routines may give high predictability but nonetheless cannot be equated with being causally compelled to follow routines.

Elster (1983) believes that causal explanations overlook the fact that human beings are "strategically rational actors" who are forever adjusting their plans to cope with a changing environment.[26] He argues that causal explanations may account for the evolution of human capacities to behave strategically but do not explain intentional actions. Capacities are inbuilt, and abilities that say what we can do, are neutral as to the extent they are inborn; skills are acquired through practice and training. Elsewhere Elster (1989) argues that the human capacity for conscious choice and the sheer complexity of human affairs reduce the significance of mechanical explanations.[27] Thomas Nagel (1970) argues in line with Kant, that even our most basic desires are not causal forces but inputs into the agent's reasoning process which influence both wants and beliefs.[28]

Voluntarism sees wants, beliefs, and actions as logically connected through the principle of rationality. Actions, it is argued, cannot even be described (e.g. the action of shopping) without implying a background of wants and beliefs while the system of wants and beliefs relevant to an action can only be described in words that refer to each other ("I want (X) because I believe (Y)" or "I believe I should do (Y) because I want (X)").

The fact that wants, beliefs, and actions are logically related does not in itself exclude the relationship being causal. More tricky is the claim that wants, beliefs, and corresponding actions cannot be described independently of each other. This implies wants and beliefs cannot be described independently of their effects in terms of actions: reasons (wants and beliefs) cannot be described independently of the action of which they are said to be the cause. This is implied in arguing that the relationship between wants, beliefs, and action is conceptual. This argument has led naturalist philosophers to move away from reason-giving explanations to other types of explanation on the ground that the reason-giving explanatory system becomes immune from testing, that is, the reason-giving explanation cannot be falsified and, if it cannot in principle be falsified, it cannot be a scientific explanation.

The notion of causal laws lying behind action is generally rejected in hard voluntarism. As Von Wright (1983) says, there are no fixed responses to the same stimuli over time since actions vary with the changing perceptions

and judgments of the agent.[29] There are also the changing perceptions and judgments due to context. We cannot even conceptualize how intentional explanations relate to a causal framework. The very idea of completely objective causal stimuli is challenged by those who see social reality as something the mind creates, given that social reality is a socially negotiated construction, pre-structured by the concepts the observer brings to the perception of events. We interpret things through a conceptual lens which varies the interpretation of stimuli for different people.

Winch (1958) in a seminal work, *The Idea of a Social Science*, that owes much to Wittgenstein's philosophy, classifies action as rule-following but denies rules can be viewed as causal.[30] He, as does Bernard Williams, regards the relationship between reasons/rules and action as a conceptual, not a causal relationship. He points out that in the physical sciences, the antecedent causal events are logically and conceptually independent of the effects. Thus, "If metals are heated they expand," the heating of metals is conceptually independent of their expansion. This logical and conceptual independence is the distinguishing feature of a causal science and is absent in the field of human action. The Winch thesis has not gone unchallenged. Bhaskar (1979) claims that Winch's argument rests on the discredited Humean concept of cause which identifies cause with the constant conjunction of events, labeling the antecedent the cause and the consequent the effect. (However, while this Humean concept of cause is easily criticized, it remains the conventional first step in inferring cause in marketing and social science generally.)

Bhaskar is a scientific realist who views the scientist's job as the discovery of mechanisms, structures or powers that cause the effects of interest. Realists do not reject the existence of theoretical entities like the electron simply because they are unobservable. Realists do not underwrite the notion of single causes being linked to single effects but argue that any particular effect results from complex interrelations among mechanisms, structures, and background conditions. Bhaskar (1979) is not concerned with individual cause and effect relationships but seeks distinct structures that causally mesh. For him the real causes of events are often complex, unobservable structures, and processes and the job of science is to identify these. Realist explanations always refer to structures and processes. Given this is so, prediction for the realist is always problematic in the social sciences as we can never be sure which set of generative mechanisms (unobservable structures) will be at work.

Another critic of Winch is Collin (1985) who argues that the conceptual connection between action descriptions and reason descriptions does not of itself rule out causal rule-following behavior because, when a person acts because of this or that, it in fact implies a causal tie.[31] Collin goes on to claim that all explanations must establish causal ties between explicans (that part of an explication which explains) and explicandum (the thing to be explained). However, and this is Collin's key point, this does not necessarily make them causal explanations. The rule-following, reason-giving explanation involves

causation but is not an explanation by causation in that the causal tie does not deliver the explanatory power nor is it the sole source of such power. In the rule-following, reason-giving explanation, the explanatory power in fact does not reside in the causal tie but in showing the rationality of the action given the person's wants and beliefs. Collin claims that in the field of human action, a purely causal explanation is only meaningful in explaining why action was initiated—in explaining things done *to* someone as opposed to things done *by* someone.

The problem for voluntarism is to demonstrate that wants and beliefs are authentic and not just the result of conditioning and socialization. Such authenticity has proved difficult since conditioning and socialization give rise to many wants and beliefs that are seemingly 'freely' held.

Compatibilism (soft determinism)

Goldman (1970) takes an unusual line in arguing that the fact that the relationship between wants/beliefs and action is logical and conceptual ensures the relationship is causal![32] Usually philosophers either argue that reasons (wants and beliefs) are causes of action or, alternatively, the relationship between reasons and action is purely conceptual.

Compatibilism agrees with hard determinism that causality covers all events whether mental or physical while agreeing with hard voluntarism that freedom of choice and actions does exist. It maintains that determinism and predictability is compatible with free will. It is a view commonly adopted in social science. It was David Hume (1711–1776) who argued that determinism does not imply necessitation. Those who claim certitude for scientific laws are confusing them with logical or mathematical theorems. Determinism and free will are not incompatible. The difference between a law of nature and a 'law' in respect to human action is the difference between description and prescription. Scientific laws in being descriptive can be true or false but human laws are prescriptive and as a consequence can be obeyed or disobeyed.

Dupre' (1993) argues that when we speak of free will, we think of it as the capacity to impose order on an increasingly disordered world and not as the absence of external causes that affect us.[33] This is the view of 'free will within constraints' that we take for granted. Thus people are able to plan for the future by taking actions, like joining AA (if one is an alcoholic) that will be a social constraint on giving in to temptation.

To compatibilists the reasons for taking action are not completely under a person's control but neither are they completely outside her control. Reasons, under this view, emanate from experience and so cannot be said to be entirely authentic: they are his or hers but not an individual's own. Thomas Aquinas (1224–1274) was a compatibilist as he saw no necessary contradiction between free choice and determinism but for him we are determined by our own beliefs and values, not simply by the brute design of nature and the happenstance of events (Pasnau, 2003).[34]

Danto (1973) argues that there is no reason why, *having reached a conclusion*, that this conclusion cannot be regarded as a cause of subsequent action.[35] The reasons that provide the grounds for that conclusion are tied to experiences: beliefs tied to experiences are suggestive of truth and wants tied to experiences are suggestive of goodness (Audi, 2003).[36] In line with this MacIntyre (1971) argues that, while rational beliefs cannot be explained in causal terms, the actions based on these rational beliefs or wants and beliefs (reasons) can be explained causally.[37] MacIntyre makes the important point that treating the real reason for action as causal is necessary if we are to distinguish reasons that are genuinely effective from mere rationalizations that are not. Harman (1973) also agrees that reasons can be treated as causes but, like Collin, argues that explanation by reasons is not causal explanation.[38] His reasons in support are, however, different from Collin's. He claims that the sequence of considerations that make up the set of reasons for an action can be described without supposing that the sequence is causal. Like MacIntyre, he is rejecting the idea of the decision-making process being a causal one. On this view, while rational beliefs and the decision-making process cannot be explained in causal terms, reasons for action can be viewed as causes.

At present, reasoning and decision-making cannot be translated satisfactorily into causal terms though this does not rule out the possibility that they can be. But can the actual beliefs and wants (reasons) that emanate from the decision-making process to form premises or rule-like reasons for action be regarded as causes of action? If we view a causal relationship as a set of conditions inducing some effect, it is reasonable to view the relationship between beliefs/wants and action as a causal one. But what about the point made earlier that reasons inevitably describe the proposed actions to be taken so cause and effect are not distinct entities? This objection is not fatal. It does not stop us regarding the genetic code in a gene as part of the cause of what subsequently evolves in the womb though the two are not independent. The major problem in practice lies in identifying the *real* reasons for action in that expressed reasons may be merely rationalizations.

The Libet studies and the Wegner argument for free will being an illusion

Wegner, a hard determinist, denies free will. If this were true, much in the consumer behavior literature would have to be reworked and rational choice theory discarded. Of course much depends on how free will is construed. In general we think of it as asserting that we are free moral *agents* whose actions are not predetermined. The concept of agency avoids the pitfalls of the dispositional approach, like saying attitudes are dispositional tendencies, in which behavior is viewed as a by-product of forces pushing both from the inside (like personality traits) and the outside (situational pressures). At present, we do not know the exact neurological or physiological conditions lying

behind behavior. This is one reason why, in talking about (voluntary) actions, we talk about reasons for action, leaving open the question of whether 'reasons' can be, and if so to what extent, causes.

Wegner draws on the work of the physiologist Benjamin Libet who discovered that the neural precursors of at least some voluntary actions take place before one is conscious of the decision to act.[39] In the Libet experiments, volunteers had their brains wired up to an electroencephalogram and told to push a button on making a choice, while simultaneously recording the time of their 'decision'. Subjects took 0.2 seconds on average to press the button. However, an electroencephalograph that monitored their brain waves indicated that the subjects' brains exhibited a spike of brain activity 0.3 seconds before they chose to push the button. Thus it seems the unconscious itself chose to press the button before the conscious mind decided to go ahead. The 'will' kicked in after the brain had started preparation for action. This suggests that the causes of the brain's activities take place fractionally earlier than any conscious awareness of deciding to carry them out. Libet, however, does not endorse Wegner's interpretation of his work since he argues that a person has the freedom to "veto": conscious free will may not initiate voluntary acts but it can control the outcome or the actual performance of the act. Nonetheless, it still suggests that free will is only able to operate within narrow boundaries.

No studies so far in neurophysiology have established a relationship between one type of brain process and one type of mental-state like attitude and such *type–type* relationships are considered highly unlikely (Lyons, 2001).[40] But does this rule out a specific brain wave relating to a specific conscious thought? Rorty (1980) argues that mental descriptions do not refer to anything at all by way of brain states.[41] And humans do not appear to be tokens of each other when it comes to the formation of their brains.

Libet takes it for granted that a *conscious* act of will must occur at the start of brain activity. This can be questioned since most of our decisions to take action seem to occur without being conscious of making any decision at all. And as Searle (2001) states, the occurrence of a readiness to act is not causally sufficient for the performance of the act.[42] In the case of the trained athlete, she can cancel her intention to act at any time: it is not analogous to her moving her hand after touching a hot stove where there is no prior intention to act. Furthermore there is a need to distinguish 'choosing' from 'deciding' since choosing may involve no deliberation. I can choose purely on the basis of 'gut' feel as I might choose using the likeability heuristic: I see → I like → I buy. I may even 'pick' at random as I do from a packet of cigarettes.

The interpretation of the Libet studies rests on what John Stuart Mill (1806–1873) called the method of agreement, one of the so-called five canons of inductive inquiry popularized by John Stuart Mill in the 19th century and still called on today in experimentation as a first step. Like the rest of Mill's canons, it is tied to the Humean concept of cause where cause is an antecedent

that is contiguous with the consequent. It is much too simplistic for identifying most causes. The canon argues that if:

AB precedes E
AC precedes E
AD precedes E
and so on.

Then it is assumed that A, spike of brain activity, being the antecedent factor common in all instances, is causally connected to E, the decision to go ahead. The method of agreement depends on having a large number of instances that are different in all respects but one. It attempts to establish that A is a sufficient condition for E. If A is a sufficient condition for E, then if A occurs, E always follows. Thus, if a sales manager employed a sales supervisor in a number of different regions and on each occasion labor turnover increased, the manager might conclude the supervisor was to blame. The difficulty lies in ensuring the agreement is in one respect only since the method cannot distinguish between true cause and mere coexistence. We can never be sure, for example, that some additional factor is not at work in each region to which the supervisor was appointed. In the Libet/Wegner experiments, there is the assumption that all the relevant brain activity is being detected and measured which is a big assumption.

The relationship can be expressed as the antecedent variable (Z) (unconscious brain wave) causes the subject's decision (X), which, as a consequence, causes the dependent variable (Y) (push button). Thus we have:

Unconscious brain wave (Z) $\rightarrow$ *Subject's conscious decision (X)* $\rightarrow$ *Push button (Y)*

(X), the subject's conscious decision, which people typically assume is an independent cause, takes the role of a mediating variable (also called an intervening or process variable) between (Z) and (Y), that is, (Z) operates via (X) to produce (Y). It assumes that (Z) (unconscious brain wave) is not a sufficient condition in itself to cause (Y) (push button). However, if (Z) were in fact a sufficient condition for (X), and (X) a sufficient condition for (Y) then (Z) would be a sufficient condition for (Y) which would make the postulating of (X) (subject's conscious decision) redundant. It is this reasoning that suggests consciousness (X) is an epiphenomenon, that is, a by-product of neural processes which exert no influence in producing the subsequent behavior (Y). On these grounds, it is claimed that there is no freedom of choice or freedom of will.

But to return to the experiment. If we assume that (Z) (unconscious brain activity) is an antecedent variable that operates through (X) (subject's conscious decision) to produce (Y) (push button) it may be that (Z)'s association with (X) is simply one of *arousing* the conscious mind and inputting data. It

could be that, when subjects are just thinking about pushing buttons, the unconscious mind goes into gear but leaves it to the conscious mind to actually press the accelerator. The fact that activity in the brain can precede a conscious decision does not show that, once the conscious mind is activated, it has no causal control over behavior or is not in a position to change whatever is received from the unconscious so the type of action taken is dependent on the conscious mind. In any case, (X), the intervening conscious decision, is not always necessary for activating behavior. People can act without reflection. A person may go along with the feeling aroused by (Z) or the initial disposition to go along with (Z) might be blocked by (X) intervening ("On second thoughts I don't think I will"). We often catch ourselves on 'automatic pilot', having to 'collect our wits' to stop us using, say, the car key to get into the house!

*f*MRI and PET scan studies

Damasio started an interest in the potential of brain scans, using magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) though it is now common to use functional magnetic resonance imaging (*f*MRI) which both records activity in addition to anatomy. There is also the well known scan technology of positron emission tomography (PET scans). These instruments show what parts of the brain are active or responding to a particular stimulus when engaged in thinking.

It is now common to brain scan a group of subjects and correlate the brain activity with the reaction to various ads or brands. Thompson (2003) quotes one neuroscientist as saying: "My God, if you combine making the can red with making it less sweet, you can measure this in a scanner and see the result. If I were Pepsi, I'd go in there and I'd start scanning people."[43] It is as if the meaning of these brain scans is obvious and interpretations unambiguous. The researcher seems quite happy to postulate a causal relationship between happenings in the brain and social constructs like self-esteem. The only *fact* is the blip on the screen: all the rest is speculation. Fodor (2004), eminent both in the field of cognitive science and philosophy, claims:[44] "Nobody has the slightest idea of what consciousness is, or what it's for, or how it does what it's for (to say nothing of 'what it's made of '). The currently fashionable brain scanning research is no help in finding out; the best it could do is to discover which brain structures consciousness depends on. This is of some use if you're thinking of cutting some brain structure out (say, for therapeutic purposes). But it's no more a theory of consciousness than the observation that, whatever consciousness is, it happens north of the neck" (p.31). Fodor agrees that psychological processes of great complexity can be unconscious while pointing out there is, as yet, no science of consciousness. Not everyone agrees with Fodor but his is a defensible position.

But the meaning of brain scans is unclear and interpretations vary widely. There is no way an examination of a person's neural processes by means of

scans and so on, enables us to investigate someone's reasoning or what they are thinking.

In the same article subjects are reported as being asked to rate a series of products on the basis of liking. Then, while the brains of the subjects were being scanned in an MRI machine, Clint Kilts, the investigator, showed them pictures of the same products again. Whenever a subject saw the product he had previously identified as one he 'truly loved', his brain showed increased activity in the medial prefrontal cortex, associated with the emotions. The investigator argues that, when this part of the brain "fired" on seeing a particular product, it was likely to be because the product clicks with self-image. This interpretation is postulating a causal relationship between the social construct of self-image and a specific happening in the brain. The establishing of such a relationship is the dream of all those who advocate reductionism, reducing as it does psychology to neuroscience. It would also establish some social constructs as indicators of something real (instead of using the phrase it is 'as if' ...) by establishing a material reference.

The author of the review article argues *f*MRI scanning is seen as offering the promise of concrete *fact*—an unbiased glimpse at the consumer's mind in action. But the only 'fact' is 'a something' on the MRI scan. The magic button in all this is identified as the medial prefrontal cortex: 'if that area is firing, a consumer isn't deliberating, he's itching to buy. At that point, it's intuitive. You say: "I'm going to do it"' (p.57). This claim involves many questionable assumptions. No one to-date claims each and every emotion can be shown to have a distinctive brain pattern. In fact, a specific brain pattern may indicate many different types of emotion. As the author at the end of the article says, many scientists are skeptical of "neuromarketing"; just because we get neurons firing does not mean that we know what the mind is doing. The fundamental question is: What does this mean?, as answering this question is basic to any interpretation of the phenomena.

In another study, researchers monitored brain scans in 67 consumers after they were given a blind taste test of Coca-Cola and Pepsi (Blakeslee, 2004).[45] We are told that each soft drink lit up the brain "reward system" (we apparently now know for sure that some part of the brain is its reward system!) and the participants were equally split as to which drink they preferred. However, on being informed which brand they were drinking, activity in a different set of brain locations 'linked to brand loyalty' overrode their original preferences. This is greeted with surprise: that consumers did not choose on the basis of taste alone but more on the basis of brand. The only thing surprising is that there was surprise, as this is a finding well-known for at least 60 years of blind tasting tests. It is interesting how researchers fail to reach out to other disciplines for relevant findings. Reactions to this 'neuromarketing' are similar to the reactions to subliminal perception studies in the 1950s; an exaggerated fear of being manipulated when the whole area at present is so full of speculative interpretations.

In still another study, reported by Blakeslee (2004), women participants ticked off their answers to a structured questionnaire whose answers reflected the respondent's trust in the retail outlet ("XYZ always treats me fairly"; "XYZ is a name I can always trust") and the respondent's loyalty to the store ("XYZ is the perfect store for me": "I can't imagine a world without XYZ"). From these answers, those with seemingly a strong emotional attachment to the store were found to be those whose areas of the brain associated with memory and emotion (the orbitofrontal cortex, the temporal pole, and the amygdala) lit up.[46] Women who were not strongly attached to the store showed little or no activation. The author says that, using such brain-imaging technology, marketers hope to glean what buyers *really* want instead of what they might say in a focus group. They hope to create loyal customers by "hooking up to their amygdala." The researchers quote Daniel Kahneman whose work (with the late Amos Tversky) won him the 2002 Nobel Prize that the emotions are important determinants of economic behavior, more so than rationality.

An article by a medical doctor argues that inside the human brain is the reward circuit (Friedman, 2006). When someone anticipates a reward this reward center lights up "like a Christmas tree" so if we want to see how a new product is perceived we can place a prospect in a magnetic resonance imaging scanner and study the activity in the brain's reward center.[47] In a study of DaimlerChrysler cars, the hypothesis put forward was that because sports cars are such social status symbols, they would be perceived as the most rewarding and so produce the greatest activation in the reward circuit. This was confirmed. However, the author goes on to say "a sports car is sexy" has literally been encoded in the average male brain! Apparently this is viewed as a legitimate deduction from the activation observed. He seems to believe that if things like mpg, safety features, and so on do not excite a man's reward circuit, the new car will "remain an engineers dream." Thus activating the reward center becomes a necessary condition for success, that is, a sufficient reason for failure! This is just plain silly, contradicting commonsense and all sorts of research.

We have no quarrel with stressing the importance of emotion but believe the uses of brain-imaging technologies are being grossly oversold. Many years ago, much the same claims were made for lie-detector tests on the ground that they could detect the emotional reactions of consumers. The problem will always be to interpret the meaning (significance) of the brain 'lighting up'. It may indicate brand recognition and/or brand resonance. Going beyond this is pure speculation. Areas of the brain lighting up does not prove the subject trusts the brand or has loyalty to the brand in the sense of 'sticking to it through thick and thin'.

This research is allied to the search for locations in the brain that are *causes* of behavior: a project that has links to the discredited phrenology in the 19th century which aimed to locate mental and personality faculties though examining bumps in the skull. This is not to suggest there are no distinct mental

faculties. We accept that one sort of brain injury damages one faculty like memory while another sort of brain injury affects the sense of smell and so on. But what evidence is there for a distinct relationship between physiological state and emotional state?

Sinha et al. (1992) found systematic physiological state differences between several negative emotions like anger and fear.[48] There are other studies along the same lines (e.g. Levenson, Ekman, and Friesen (1990)).[49] In particular, Goleman (1995) argues that the emotions prepare the body for different kinds of response and certain discrete emotions have distinct physiological aspects. Thus, in anger, the blood flows to the hands; in fear, the blood goes to the large skeletal muscles; in happiness there is an increased level of activity in the brain center that inhibits negative feelings; in sadness, there is a drop in energy level.[50] Anger and fear we share with all animals and there is a corresponding physiology. On the other hand, there is no evidence that the more important self-assessment emotions of guilt, shame, pride, and the emotions to which they are conceptually linked such as humiliation have a distinct counterpart in the neurological or physiological system. These emotions are social/cultural in origin and more important to marketers. However, no evidence to identify such emotions by using physiological measures is just that: no evidence.

Jerome Kagan, another Harvard psychologist, points out that some traditional psychological puzzles are being reduced to asking: "What is happening in the brain when language, memory and decision are ongoing processes?" Like some of us in marketing he is highly critical of the many claims made. For him, a brain state is mostly a joint product of one's past history and the event itself, but this past history is by no means always knowable from brain evidence. Kagan mentions an article in the official journal of the Royal Society in the UK which offered the prediction that one day scientists will be able to identify the particular brain state that precedes each freely willed decision or action. Kagan dismisses this claim, arguing there cannot in fact be a unique brain state across all individuals that precedes "the selection of a salad over a soup." Just because every decision arises from brain activity, it does not necessarily follow that a specific psychological state correlates with a distinct brain activity.

The evidence does not support the notion that particular mental states are tied to fixed places in the brain though some scientists persist in research that presupposes otherwise. Thus, although a face almost invariably activates a cortical site in the posterior part of the brain, namely, the fusiform gyrus, a picture of a spider will also activate this site if the person is afraid of spiders, while even photos of cars will activate the site for those who love cars. Any set of brain characteristics permits more than just one inference as to psychological state. Pictures of angry faces, unexpected but desirable events, as well as an attractive nude, all produce similar patterns of activation in the amygdala and other parts of the brain. "Reflection on all the evidence reveals that the primary cause of amygdalar activation is an unexpected event whether

snake or a friend not seen for years" (p.92). An unexpected event is a pretty broad category also depending on what constitutes 'unexpected' for the individual. In any case, if a brain site does not give rise to increased activity in meeting some challenge, this does not imply that it did not enter into the person's reaction since inhibition of the site may be part of the reaction. Kagan is insistent that a more accurate understanding of the relation between brain and mind will depend on the acceptance that such relationships are always dependent on the context in which the individual is acting.

Reducing psychological states to neurological brain states falls under 'reductionism' and as Kagan says, the dream (fantasy?) of reducing psychological states and behavior to the activity of "tiny" neurons emerged a century ago. But if there is reductionism in the natural sciences, why cannot we reduce psychology to neuroscience? That this is feasible motivates those seeking to attribute psychological states to profiles of brain activity, implying that the brain state is a proxy for the psychological state. Kagan argues that distinct terminology for mind and brain states will always be necessary because everything has both a referential-meaning and a sense-meaning. Referential-meaning is the thing to which the item refers while the sense-meaning is all the thoughts that are evoked by the name. Sense-meanings differ widely among individuals (think of the many sense-meanings of the word Republican) and for the same individual depending on context. It is in fact not even possible to use measures of brain activity as a proxy for, say, states of fear or anxiety since there are multiple forms of these emotional states. This does not mean Kagan dismisses biological material to keep psychology from vanishing into neuroscience. He agrees that adding biological information on brain activity can add to a more profound understanding of behavior in that brain measures may one day provide some notion of the meaningfulness of different brain patterns. But how to translate a biological measure into a meaningful psychological one is a major hurdle. And he insists that people do have freedom to decide and that their decision is not knowable from measurements of their brains.

Cognitive neuroscience has been sharply criticized by Bennett, a neuroscientist, and Hacker, a philosopher (2003).[51]

As Bennett and Hacker say, we can correlate a person's expressed thoughts with corresponding specific brain activity detected by PET or *f*MRI (functional magnetic resonance imaging) scans but this in no way shows the *brain* is thinking but simply shows that such-and-such a part of the person's cortex is active when the *person* is thinking. The neural events in the brain may correlate with seeing, thinking or whatever a person says he is doing, but the brain is not an organ of perception and it is conceptually confusing to talk of the brain seeing things: it does not; it is the person who does the seeing. They argue that experimenters who use PET and *f*MRI try to identify the locus of thought in the brain, asking the subject to think of something, then generalizing from such studies to all thinking, oblivious to all the different kinds of thinking. There is a conceptual connection between the imagination and

the power to summon up visual or auditory images and it is appealing to think such images are just the same as physical images, only mental. But mental images are not necessary for imagining since we can imagine *descriptions* of what it would be like, say, to go on a holiday to Rome. However, mental images do commonly cross one's mind when one imagines something perceptible. It is now a common claim in neuroscience (including cognitive psychology) that all voluntary actions begin in the brain independently of any relevant conscious acts of volition. Libet (1993) conceives voluntary action (erroneously according to Bennett and Hacker) as bodily movement caused by an act of volition and concludes, as we have seen, that such antecedent volition is started by the brain ahead of any conscious awareness of a desire to move. In other words, he views voluntary control as restricted to inhibiting or permitting movement that is already ongoing. Bennett and Hacker say this assertion is confused since it is not necessary for an act to be voluntary for it to be preceded by a feeling of desiring, wanting or intending or in fact by any urge to do it. It is in fact not necessary for a person to think of himself as being moved involuntarily just because he moves without feeling an urge to move or feeling a desire to move. As a person begins to type he or she feels no urges, desires or intentions. While I can say if my movements are voluntary or involuntary the grounds would not relate to my feeling some urge, desire, and intention before making a move.

Bennett and Hacker argue that Libet misconceives the nature of voluntary action: "The fact that the neurons in the supplementary motor cortex fire 350 ms before the feeling is allegedly apprehended does not show that the brain 'unconsciously decided' to move before the agent did. It merely shows that the neuronal processes that activate the muscles began before the time at which the agent *reported* a 'feeling of desire' or 'feeling an urge to move' to have occurred. But, to repeat, a voluntary movement is not a movement caused by a felt urge, any more than to refrain voluntarily from moving is to feel an urge *not* to move which *prevents* one from moving" (p.230). When the consumer is shopping, she does not require that 'she feel an intention' (there is no such thing) nor does she necessarily need to 'feel a desire' but simply act in accordance with her overall shopping plan with the ongoing movements she makes accordingly voluntary and intentional.

Descartes equated the mind with the soul and Cartesian dualism viewed mind (soul) and body as distinct entities. If so, how does the mind interact with the body and how could thought exercise control over the body? Psychologists came to argue that the mind was a material substance, with cognitive psychologists, viewing the brain as a computer, with the mind being simply the software of the brain. The mind viewed as software achieved two goals for cognitive psychology. First, it avoided the charge that cognitive psychology postulates dualism: a separation of mind and body, since the mind as software implies the mind is a material substance. This is important since it made mute the accusation by Damasio (1994) that cognitive psychologists were committing "*Descartes' Error*" in his book of that title.[52] Second, mind as

software creates a distinct niche for psychology, without cognitive psychologists being in direct competition with physiology and neurology (Lyons, 2001).[53] But the metaphor of the mind as a computer is controversial.

Searle (1992) sees the metaphor as deceptive in that dissimilar features of computers are carried over to the brain, misleading people into believing that the mind is in fact a computer.[54] For Searle, computer programs are defined syntactically in terms of the manipulation of formal symbols such as 0s and 1s. In contrast, minds contain semantic content, that is, they have both syntax and semantics (meaning). Searle points out that, while the natural sciences deal with the intrinsic properties of nature, the social sciences deal with observer-relative features. If the intrinsic properties of a chair are cellulose fibers, this is the domain of science. On the other hand, the belief that it is a chair is observer-relative.

Epiphenomenalism

Epiphenomenalism is the doctrine that conscious mental phenomena are entirely caused by (physical) neurological phenomena in the brain but these conscious mental phenomena do not themselves have any effects, either physical or mental: consciousness is simply the side effect of causal processes lying outside consciousness. On this basis, no *subjective* experience has any significance for behavior, no more than a man's shadow affects what he does. We feel free to decide and to act but this is an illusion according to epiphenomenalists like the father of behaviorism, J.B. Watson. In rejecting the method of introspection used by his predecessors in psychology, Watson argued that his psychology (behaviorism) should be entirely concerned with the environmental conditions that elicit behavioral responses as the goal of a scientific psychology was prediction and control. His S (stimulus) R (response) psychology had no use for mental concepts. Skinner's radical behaviorism accepted that we have feelings and mental states but argued that we are deluded in thinking they have any effect on our behavior: all mental states are mere epiphenomena. Skinner viewed reinforcement as the real cause of behavior. He did not feel the need to explain why we feel and believe that our wants, beliefs, and intentions are instrumental in our actions.

Epiphenomenalism goes with determinism. We are concerned that, if we accept determinism, individual responsibility is threatened as freedom of choice requires an absence of determinism. While many of us are willing to accept that the various roles we adopt in life such as parent, supervisor, or consumer, strongly influence what we do, we nonetheless feel we are not bound to do what the unconscious desires would have us do, since we feel we could have done otherwise. We may be like chess players writ-large, bound by the rules of chess but choosing our own individual tactics within the rules.

If we had complete freedom, being absolutely responsible for whatever we do, this amounts to being the complete cause of whatever we do. This is, of course, just not so: we always operate within contextual/situational constraints.

On the other hand, if we had no more conscious control over our actions than a computer has in running its software, the very meaning of 'rational agent' would make no sense: we would simply be puppets to unconscious determinants. Epiphenomenalism is a strong naturalist position in that *naturalism*, as a philosophy, typically posits that the physical/natural world is the only true reality and that psychic events or happenings in the mind are inconsequential. Dreams are epiphenomena in that we assume they merely accompany biochemical and neurological events during sleep but have no causal efficacy.

Behaviorism was a reaction to *introspectionism*, the notion that each of us can make a correct identification of our mental states. It is not that Skinner (who developed the dominant operant conditioning approach in behaviorism) denies the existence of inner mental states. In fact he agrees that people have purposes but argues that meaningful statements about human purposes are reducible to statements about functional relationships between independent physical/environmental conditions and purposive behavior. If we believe only in external event causation, reasons for action would strictly speaking be epiphenomenal or in the language of philosophers, reasons would be "supervenient", that is, we acknowledge the dependence, or supervenience, of the mental on the physical and, as a consequence, the dependence of mental causal relationships on causal processes at the physical level (Macdonald and Macdonald, 1995).

Emmet (1985) promotes the view of mind–body as a unity with different levels of functioning that influence each other.[55] She argues that higher mental functionings require lower physical functionings but they are not supervenient on them since they can influence the working of the physical functioning, notably in directing bodily movements while additionally they can modify physiological functions through emotional states.[56] If thoughts could be shown to be neurophysiological properties, there would be no need to talk of epiphenomenalism, as mental events would then be identical to physical events.

If we make the assumption that wants at the product level are fairly stable, it allows macroeconomists to model changes in buying behavior as arising purely from varying external circumstances. Similarly, those in sociology who view social factors or contextual factors as all-determining are adhering to an epiphenomenalist position. Thus we have the 'Strong Programme' in the sociology of knowledge that asserts even the very content of scientific theories is caused by social factors rather than scientific thinking.[57] These sociologists would seem to believe that this form of sociological inquiry is "in a better position to deliver truth about science than science is to deliver truth about the world."[58] But neither sociologists nor economists generally endorse epiphenomenalism. Economists happily assume consumers are agents, undertaking purposive behavior, so buying becomes the joint product of goals sought, beliefs, and constraints. Epiphenomenalism is still a serious topic in psychology (if it ever went away) as reflected in an editorial written by the editor in *Psychology Today*, a magazine for the general reader with its ear to the

ground as to what is up and coming: "I also don't believe that thinking causes action, although we often think before we act. Thinking is just another type of action, and it's the entire sequence of actions, both private and observable that we need to try to understand" (Epsein, 2003).[59]

Daniel Robinson (2003) as a psychologist, does not endorse this view and the implication that we appear ever less responsible for our actions.[60] He agrees that if we confine our research just to the computer-like functions of the brain (which some cognitive psychologists do), there is support for epiphenomenalism. It is also true that hypnotism (as Freud argued) demonstrates the power of the unconscious to influence behavior while the mind in a hypnotic trance does not affect behavior. But computer-like functions and hypnotic trances are not what distinguish humans. As Modell (2003) says, subjective human experience must be part of any scientific explanation of how the mind works.[61] He rejects the idea that mental functioning can be equated with some form of computation as the construction of *meaning* (significance) is not the same as information processing. The very idea of our being successful or unsuccessful in achieving our goals would find no place in a world where actions were simply described from a mechanistic perspective.

An illustration of body–mind interaction is provided by the use of placebos. Moerman (2003) in discussing the placebo effect on pain shows that those who take a placebo diligently do better than those who only take the placebo occasionally; the injection of a placebo works better than pills and those placebos *given a brand name* relieve pain better than generic placebos.[62] This is an extraordinary confirmation of brand power on beliefs. Belief or faith in the placebo increased its effectiveness. How is this achieved? Moerman shows the best predictor relates to the doctor's qualities: the more convinced the doctor is that a drug or placebo will work, the more likely it is that it really will work.

2 The dominance of the adaptive unconscious (?)

The most common controversy in the social sciences arises from the competing claims of *positivism* and *perspectivism*, these being rival accounts of how we go about social science. As Fay (1996) says, the positivist aim is to arrive at knowledge that mirrors an objective world, believing we can attain a system of objective knowledge that reflects Reality as it is.[1] In marketing, positivism is associated with those who seek to follow the methodology of the natural sciences, with its strong emphasis on *causal analysis*, quantification, and experimentation. Perspectivism is the popular alternative.

Perspectivism argues that there can be no intellectual activity without an organizing conceptual scheme that reflects a perspective. Perspectivism makes it impossible to access knowledge of independently existing facts since so-called 'facts' are rooted in the perspective adopted. Searle (1999) rejects this claim showing that just because I see reality from a certain point of view does not mean I never perceive a reality with an independent existence. Because perspectivism can degenerate into relativism, some writers prefer the term 'multiplicity of perspectives' but, like Fay, we stick to the word perspectivism while equating it with a multiplicity of perspectives. However, a different perspective is coming to psychology that revolves around how much credit to give to the unconscious mind in molding, directing, and activating behavior.

As Trigg (1999)[2] says

> In recent times, the ability of reason to control our destiny has been doubted, and all kinds of unconscious forces, both social and psychological, have been alleged to be the real masters. The free, autonomous individual has suddenly seemed to be a mere puppet dancing to a tune that often cannot be heard. (p.1)

O'Hear (2001) makes a similar comment:[3]

> it is not surprising that scientific accounts of our behavior tend toward eliminative materialism. That is, they tend toward the view that in a fully scientific account of human behavior we can and should

> dispense with reference to conscious thoughts and beliefs altogether. For what goes on in us at the conscious level falsifies the true springs of our activity. (p.110)

If paradigms in social science, like behaviorism and cognitive psychology, 'create' the conceptual lenses through which social scientists view their world, these paradigms nonetheless cannot ignore studies on the (adaptive) unconscious and the claims being made since these studies impinge on every paradigm explaining human behavior. While it may be easy to dismiss postmodernists who claim that all critical reason is a delusion and attempts to generalize about human behavior are futile, the claims made for the role of the unconscious are backed by the sort of argument marketers respect.

One reason for the lack of serious debate is that the questions raised seem to belong more to philosophy than to psychology with many conceptual issues going beyond what experimental evidence can decide. Not surprisingly, the two authors quoted earlier are philosophers. Even if the issues are in fact mainly philosophical, there still needs to be more discussion of what is currently being claimed.

The concept of the unconscious

Clinicians use the term consciousness to (a) cover our inner awareness of experiences, (b) refer to our capacity to intentionally react to stimuli, and (c) our knowledge and acknowledgement of a conscious self (Sims, 1995).[4] In whatever way the term consciousness is used, it contrasts with the unconscious, a term used to refer to one of three *states*:

(i) A lack of awareness through disease or a brain injury
(ii) Lack of awareness of ongoing internal or external processes on account of being asleep
(iii) Unconscious, with the meaning given to it in psychology to refer to the fact that we are only aware of certain parts of our internal and external environments; of the rest we are unaware.

As demonstrated by the electroencephalogram, these three states of unconsciousness are three different organic states (Sims, 1995).

The view that there are happenings in the mind to which we have no access was widely accepted throughout the 19th century, having been promoted earlier by both Leibniz (1646–1716) and Nietzsche (1844–1900) before Freud's views were published. Much that goes on in the human body occurs at the non-conscious level like breathing and blood circulation. Once we acknowledge that non-conscious mental states exist, the door is open for non-conscious *intentional* states to exist and this is what Freud maintained in talking about our having unconscious beliefs and desires.

Freud treated the contents of the unconscious as previously the content of consciousness: troubling memories and harmful fantasies, now repressed, yet still actively conditioning conscious experience. The Freudian unconscious is closely guarded by a 'censor' that can scan, interpret and screen the content of the memories for harmful material. Except for the less zealously guarded preconscious, this was Freud's concept of the unconscious and this will be contrasted below with the newer concept of the *adaptive* unconscious.

Typical of a growing band of cognitive psychologists is Timothy Wilson (2002) of the University of Virginia who emphasizes the unconscious at work in the higher-order mental processes of reasoning, making judgments, motivating, and feeling and even in determining personality.[5] Wilson's *Strangers to Ourselves: Discovering the Adaptive Unconscious* subscribes to the view that the unconscious is all-pervasive in human judgment, feelings, motives, and behavior; that we do not know ourselves very well, mainly because much of what we would like to know about ourselves resides outside conscious awareness. If Wilson and others are right that the adaptive unconscious is a dominant force in thought and action, this limits the potential of introspection for self-understanding as no amount of introspection can cast light on the contents of an unconscious mind not open to inspection.

The most basic criticism of such a view is that made by Bennett and Hacker (2003).[6] They would argue that Wilson commits the *mereological fallacy* which is to ascribe to the brain or the mind properties that can only be ascribed intelligibly to the person as a whole. Only human beings, not their brains, can intelligibly be said to see, hear, smell, and taste things, perceive and make decisions. It is human beings who think, reason, and decide, not their brains: a brain is simply a necessary condition for us to perceive, think and feel. It is an error to talk about the activities of the brain being "unconscious." The work of the brain is not done consciously nor can it be said that the work of the brain is done unconsciously for the brain is not a conscious creature with the capacity to be conscious. It is the individual who can be said to do things consciously and unconsciously. Many things we do (as shoppers) are carried out without thought. However, this does not imply that the thinking that would be needed in the case of a novice shopper goes on now 'unconsciously' for the experienced shopper; it need not go on at all since the relevant skill has been acquired—just as an adult who has the established synaptic connections in the brain can take in a sentence at a time without any talk of things happening unconsciously.

Wilson argues for the dominance of the unconscious. Although he is not concerned with establishing credentials as a hard determinist or compatibilist, he sees most behavior as emanating from unconscious causes. He uses the word "modern" in labeling what he has to say; giving the impression that he is describing current, accepted orthodoxy. In contrast, John Searle (1992) claims that all bona fide mental states are conscious mental states on the ground there are no unconscious mental states but simply non-conscious *neural* states and processes.[7] Searle rejects the idea of the unconscious acting

on "rules" that are inaccessible in principle to consciousness. In a later paper (1995), Searle talks about the centrality of consciousness to the study of the mind and how in rejecting consciousness as a topic to be explored, we have put in its place the unconscious.[8] Given this is so, there is a need to answer questions (a) about its mode of existence (ontology); (b) what it does (causation); and (c) about how we find out about it (epistemology). He goes on to argue that postulating inaccessible mental processes is a pre-Darwinian conception of the function of the brain: we are in effect still anthropomorphizing the brain as we were anthropomorphizing plants before the Darwinian revolution. (This echoes the Bennett and Hacker accusation of committing the mereological fallacy.) We are ascribing intentionality to processes in the brain which are in principle inaccessible to consciousness. This ascription must be either metaphorical, as with ascriptions of mental states to plants, or it is false as our ascriptions to plants would be false if we tried to take them literally. Searle sees this as emanating from our pathetic ignorance about brain functioning which gives rise to the hope that some day brain science will locate all the unconscious intelligent processes for us. Searle claims we have no unified notion of the unconscious today, though in the case of Freud's (repressed) concept of the unconscious, unconscious desires were always bubbling to the surface so they are always potentially conscious. In fact psychoanalysis would claim to being able to bring to the surface some of this unconscious material.

Wilson together with Nisbett (1977) has been a pioneer in promoting and researching the claim about the pervasive power of the unconscious in thought and action.[9] He defines the unconscious as a mental process that is inaccessible to consciousness but impacts judgments, feelings, and behavior. *If we define the unconscious as those non-conscious mental activities that impact judgments, feelings and behavior, then, by definition, the unconscious is always at work in judgments, feelings and behavior.* This definition reflects a theoretical position that definitionally makes the unconscious dominant. Yet there is vagueness about the word 'inaccessible'. For instance, I cannot remember something that has been forgotten just because I want to do so. In this sense unconscious memory is inaccessible. But the memories we do want to recall we typically manage to recall and there are a number of tactics that help us extract 'lost' memories.

Although the unconscious may be inaccessible to the conscious mind, cognitive scientists attempt to understand unconscious processes. Auyang (2001) argues that most in cognitive science pay too little attention to conscious experience but seek instead to understand processes that are not conscious:[10]

> Most disciplines in cognitive science share a characteristic: they pay little attention to conscious experiences but concentrate on unconscious processes. They study not thinking processes but neural and brain processes. You are aware of your thinking but not the neural processes that occur inside your skull; however neuroscientists can monitor those

> processes with tools such as imagers and electrodes. One reason for the emphasis on unconscious processes is the constraint of finely controlled techniques of scientific research. These techniques are powerful in investigating unconscious processes which are relatively rigid and simple. They are less adapted to investigating everyday experiences that, being far broader and more complex, burst the narrow focus of laboratory experiments.
>
> (p.5)

As Bennett and Hacker (2003) say, consciousness can be transitive or intransitive. *Intransitive* consciousness has no object at all but simply implies being awake as opposed to being unconscious or asleep. It is intransitive consciousness that receives much of the attention in discussions on consciousness. In contrast, *transitive* consciousness is neglected. Transitive consciousness relates to being conscious that something is this or that so we speak of (a) *perceptual* consciousness as in being conscious, say, of the sound of music. Only those things we perceive and *realize* we perceive are objects of which we are conscious. Much of what we see we hardly notice, never mind paying attention to it; (b) *somatic* consciousness refers to being conscious of sensations like pain that do not involve any perceived objects. On the other hand there is no difference between feeling a pain and being conscious of a pain: feeling implies consciousness; (c) affective consciousness covers emotion and mood where the emotion may erupt with only conscious recognition of it occurring later. These distinctions are important since it is generally assumed that transitive consciousness refers to just one thing.

Through extending the concept of consciousness to all perception with all perceiving characterized as 'experience', the question for cognitive scientists has become: How can happenings in a material world create something as distinct from matter as subjective experience? This question (contrary to Auyang) has led many in neuroscience to focus on conscious experience or the mental state of a person while conscious. But as Bennett and Hacker (2003) say, many psychological attributes cannot be categorized at all as forms of experience: attributes like thinking, knowing, and believing. In any case, a 'conscious experience' is not an experience with the property of being conscious; it is the person who has the experience who is conscious and conscious of the experience with that experience embracing not just what is perceived but sensations and emotions as well. Bennett and Hacker reject the notion that all cases of perceiving something are necessarily cases of being conscious of that something, while that of which we become conscious is an object, not a subject, of consciousness.

Although denying the conscious mind is an epiphenomenon, Wilson endorses Wegner and Wheatley (1999) who argue that the experience of a conscious will is often an illusion.[11] The word 'experience' and the word 'often' makes this statement hard to pin down. The fact is that we do not have any sense of 'experiencing' free will but only of *exercising* free will and we feel free to do that anytime unless addicted. We can think about our desire for

instant gratification while having the desire not to have this desire. Is this a case of not having free will? Wegner and Wheatley argue that, because a thought is followed by an action in line with that thought, it does not demonstrate the thought is the cause of the action. They argue the relationship between thought and action may be spurious since both thought and action may result from antecedent happenings in the adaptive unconscious. But, as Bennett and Hacker show, the type of evidence on which these authors draw is problematic and their argument ignores how thoughts can be deliberated and concepts manipulated in the conscious mind to arrive at novel new thoughts and decisions.

This concept of deliberation to arrive at novel thoughts was also downplayed by Freud in emphasizing the dominance of the unconscious. When Freud claimed that a person's actions were the result of unconscious thought processes, he argued those thought processes did not follow the rules of rational inference, with the consequence that no logical connection could necessarily be drawn between beliefs/wants and actions. One wonders whether Freud would have accepted this conclusion applied to his own actions. All abstract thinking needs language and there is no support for the idea of the adaptive unconscious having its own language ("neutralize") to facilitate abstract thought. Intuitively we can imagine, like Freud, inner desires pressing for satisfaction but the conscious mind can exercise forbearance as it compares, evaluates, and ranks the various possible actions that can be taken.

There is also the matter of 'truth' since the role of beliefs is to track 'truth' about the world as a matter of survival. (This probably explains why curiosity is a motivator.) Could the search for truth be fully explained through the concept of the adaptive unconscious? Could the adaptive unconscious be the force behind the mathematician engaged in mathematical problem-solving? This cannot be ruled out in that the unconscious may play a role in mathematical discovery but how much? Few would think it to be major. This is not to deny we go along at times with whatever just comes to mind. Wilson's own position is between the two extremes of consciousness-as-the-chief-executive and consciousness-as-epiphenomenal-press-secretary. This is defensible since to be absolutely free to do what one wants, a person would have to be causa sui, a cause of oneself.

As Hollis (1996) says, people are not prisoners of inputs to the mind, neither social nor psychic inputs, and no social science should proceed as if they were.[12] This is because people can reflect and deliberate whatever comes to mind though what is recalled can be constraining on what is decided. Like Fay, Hollis argues that to specify the consumer's reasons (*real* reasons) for action is to describe the reasoning process that guides the action. Some of that reasoning process will be non-conscious but by no means all.

Wilson contrasts the *adaptive* unconscious with consciousness:

- *First*, the adaptive unconscious consists of multiple systems in the form of a collection of modules that perform independent functions at

the non-conscious level. Consciousness, in contrast, is a single, solitary mental system, not a collection of different modules. Unless people suffer from a multiple personality syndrome, they possess only one conscious self. Wilson does not quote evidence for this statement and the claim is not unequivocal. For example, in his *Of Two Minds: The Revolutionary Science of Dual-Brain Psychology*[13] Schiffer claims we have two minds or two consciousnesses (not just one brain that is split); each consciousness having a different degree of maturity and each one either associated with the left or the right brain. Schiffer supports his thesis with experiments each of us can undertake to show that we can experience different moods by closing off one conscious mind as opposed to the other. In any case, how does the idea of one conscious self square with daydreaming (fantasizing) which is conscious even if low key?

- *Second*, Wilson claims the adaptive unconscious is an on-line detector of patterns in the environment; acting as quickly as possible to signal whether good or bad. Damasio's (1994) work in neuroscience and that of others supports this claim that everything we encounter is instantaneously evaluated good or bad in terms of consequences that relate to our concerns, within a quarter of a second.[14] On this basis, we often react emotionally before there is time to consciously interpret and evaluate the input. Wilson contrasts this function of the adaptive unconscious with the role of consciousness as an "after-the-fact-checker."
- *Third*, the adaptive unconscious focuses on the here-and-now whereas the long view requires the involvement of consciousness to do the mental simulation involved in planning. As Bennett and Hacker would say, it is nonsense to treat the adaptive unconscious as a person: it is the individual who focuses on the here-and-now. When worded like this it seems a little odd to say that the adaptive unconscious propels us to just consider the here-and-now. In any case, is Wilson being consistent? Planning may take place in the here-and-now but planning itself is concerned with the future, so statements by Wilson about the adaptive unconscious being involved in planning and goal setting need to be more fully explicated and reconciled with the claim about the adaptive unconscious being concerned with just the here-and-now.
- *Fourth*, the unconscious undertakes automatic (fast, unintentional) processes as opposed to the controlled (slow/intentional) processing occurring in consciousness. Is this statement consistent with the extravagant claims made about the role of the adaptive unconscious in the book? Is it consistent with the claim that the adaptive unconscious "plays a major executive role in our mental lives? It gathers information, interprets and evaluates it, and sets goals in motion, quickly and efficiently" (p.35). Would all this be grouped under automatic, fast, unintentional processes? What makes it difficult to evaluate Wilson's claims is a pervasive vagueness about the *referential*-meaning of most of the terms used to express Wilson's thesis, as if these concepts were unproblematic.

The book's essential speculative nature is disguised by a deliberate mist of vagueness.

- *Fifth*, Wilson argues the unconscious tends to rigidity in bending information to fit preconceptions, making it next to impossible to realize preconceptions can be wrong. The study quoted by Wilson in support will be familiar to readers. It is that of school children being arbitrarily classified on an IQ basis, with subsequent teacher behavior and assessments of students becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy to cohere with the IQ scores given. The IQ scores established preconceptions about the subsequent likely performance of the students and subsequent evidence was made to fit these preconceptions. But what about the initial preconceptions that were uprooted? This study would indicate the teacher's initial preconceptions were uprooted by changing expectations through new information. It is thus not clear this study is supportive of the thesis about bending information to suit preconceptions, though there is a good deal of evidence for the tendency to distort information to fit *existing* preconceptions (Gilovich, 1991).[15] As elsewhere there is the mereological fallacy: it is silly to talk of the adaptive unconscious being rigid rather than the individual.
- *Sixth*, non-conscious skills such as implicit learning can appear before children have acquired the ability to reason at the conscious level. It is probably true that we can learn 'how' skills before we can understand *why* in terms of explanation—and not just in the case of children.
- *Seven*, it is claimed that the unconscious is more sensitive to negative information while consciousness is more sensitive to positive information. Wilson argues there is evidence that positive and negative information is processed in different parts of the brain which would seem to be consistent with the notion of the unconscious being separate in the brain from the conscious. But it is people who are sensitive to information, not the brain which is not a creature. The idea of the unconscious recognizing that some incoming flow is actually information and appraising it as negative seems just unreal.

The adaptive unconscious and personality

Wilson argues that it makes little sense to talk about a "single self" because the adaptive unconscious and the conscious self have different patterns of responding to the social world. On these grounds he rejects the idea of our having just a single personality, while the prediction of behavior on the basis of personality measures is further frustrated by the influence of the social context in shaping people's behavior, independent of personality. For Wilson, the failure of personality measures to predict behavior is tied to our having both an adaptive self and a conscious self with the unconscious self impacting more on people's uncontrolled, veiled responses, whereas the consciously constructed self is more likely to influence our deliberative, explicit responses.

Wilson says someone's "self-theory" that she is shy and introverted can be at odds with her adaptive unconscious which over time has become quite extraverted. Her real personality is more likely to reside in the adaptive unconscious. Personality, under the control of our adaptive unconscious, is more likely to explain and predict spontaneous, quick 'impulse buys'. In contrast, the deliberated decision to go ahead and purchase a particular house is more likely to fall under the control of conscious self-attributed motives. This suggests that, while purchases made under the control of the adaptive unconscious are likely to be justified by rationalizations, the reasons given for deliberated purchases are more likely to encompass 'real' reasons.

Although Wilson explicitly rejects the doctrine of epiphenomenalism, that consciousness is an incidental effect of neural processes and not a cause of thought or action, he comes fairly close in arguing that it is the unconscious part of the brain that is all-dominant. If one's research focuses on the unconscious and not conscious experience, there is a natural urge toward epiphenomenalism. Wilson employs the metaphor of a snowball as representing the conscious with the massive iceberg of the adaptive unconscious hidden from view. This is analogous to talk about 99 per cent of our DNA being shared with the apes as if each percentage is of equal significance. If humans share 50 per cent of their genes with a tomato, this does not make the attributes constituting humanness 50 per cent tomato. The big difference between chimps and humans is that humans are far, far more susceptible to social reinforcement while DNA can do nothing on its own: it is just basic information for the construction of the proteins from which all life forms are built.

Wilson seems to regard the adaptive unconscious as the most important element in behavior. Yet no one has laid out the full range of thoughts and actions in a way that would allow us to talk intelligently about which is likely to be responsible for what. The studies quoted, mostly experiments on college students, do not test the Wilson assertions severely since there are other interpretations of the findings that need to be explored. The few neurological experiments are more impressive but less relevant to the wider claims made. Many actions of consumers resemble 'picking behavior' rather than deliberated choices. In picking behavior, we have reason to make a choice but no particular reason to make a specific choice (Margalit, 2002).[16] Just as a consumer, when faced with a shelf of detergents may simply pick at random, being indifferent to any differences, so people may on occasions just act as the mood takes them. It is doubtful whether such behaviour can be described as submission to the adaptive unconscious so much as a conscious decision not to make the effort needed to make a more reasoned choice. The same goes for much habitual behavior.

Epiphenomenalism is appealing since it holds out the possibility of discovering universal laws (as opposed to statistical regularities). In contrast teleological explanations explain by ascribing *functions* or ascribing *goals*. Teleological explanations, whether in terms of goal ascription or function served, upset those who seek to explain all phenomena in terms of causal laws.

Functional explanations show the contribution made by each part to the system overall so the function of language, for example, is to facilitate communication. The function of consciousness might be to represent information about what is occurring outside and inside the human organism to allow information to be evaluated and acted upon. *Goal ascription* explanations explain in terms of purposes, reasons, meaning or the significance of something for the individual.

Those subscribing to the philosophy of *naturalism* eschew teleological explanations since naturalism claims that everything belongs to the world of nature and can be studied by the methods used to study that nature, namely, the methods of natural science searching for universal causal laws. Ernest Nagel, an early advocate of naturalism, more than anyone else sought to reformulate (without success) functional explanations into a law-like format, but talking about functions served always presupposes a system, since function served is in terms of the contribution made to some system and this fact could not be accommodated by some law-like format.[17]

Wilson dismisses introspection for *explaining how the mind works* in that much of what we introspectively believe about cognition is not true: what is introspected to be going on in consciousness does not explain cognition. Hence Wilson's title: *Strangers to Ourselves.* However, Humphrey (1983), a Cambridge experimental psychologist, claims that consciousness has come into being as an evolutionary adaptation for understanding others through the mechanism of introspection.[18] Introspection was the method favored by the founders of modern experimental psychology in the 19th century (e.g. Wilhelm Wundt) but was discarded when it became apparent it did not conform to the behaviorist criterion of being an objective method of inquiry. Humphrey uses the metaphor of introspection being an "inner eye" and thinks we have thrown out the baby with the bathwater since he sees introspection as playing an important role in interpersonal psychology. It is not that Humphrey is returning to 'introspectionism' as a process for discovering psychological 'laws'. Humphrey argues there are not, and never will be, Newtonian principles of human behavior and that the academic psychologists who emulate the methods of classical physics have proved what any layman might have told them at the start: the mountain of human complexity cannot be turned into a molehill of scientific laws. (p.5/6)

For Humphrey, introspection is what makes it possible to understand others in social communities: it makes it possible for an individual to model the behavior of others, reasoning by analogy from his own case. The facts of his own case are revealed to him through examination of the contents of consciousness. Humphrey asserts that: "Without introspection to guide me, the task of deciphering the behavior of my fellow men would be quite beyond my powers" (p.33). Humphrey stresses the importance of self-observation for understanding others. By self-observation he means not merely looking *at* one's own behavior but looking *in* on it—in on the thoughts and passions which accompany it. (p.6) He gives the name "reflexive consciousness"

(consciousness of consciousness) to this capacity. He rejects those who see consciousness as having no biological function, and being merely an epiphenomenon; the irrelevant "noise in the machine." Humphrey claims people have privileged access to themselves as a model for studying others: as humans we can *look in* on our thoughts and the passions that accompany our behavior. Humphrey argues that without introspection, deciphering the behavior of other people would be impossible. Understanding is always constrained by what we ourselves have experienced and having the relevant experience makes us better judges of how people are likely to react: ex-alcoholics are in a better position to understand alcoholics, and golf enthusiasts better than non-golfers in understanding the market behavior of golfers. For Humphrey, consciousness has come into being as an evolutionary adaptation for doing introspective psychology. Consciousness gives us direct access to the concept of feeling pain, feeling fear, feeling contentment, etc—without which we would find the task of modeling the behavior of others impossibly difficult.

This is a persuasive argument but Bennett and Hacker are critical of Humphrey's idea that consciousness evolved to enable animals to develop conceptual frameworks that facilitate modeling another animal's behavior. For them, this is simply incoherent as only language users have anything that could be recognizably called a "conceptual framework", that is, a web of logically connected concepts. Humphrey compares introspection to an inner eye, comparable to other sense-organs. Bennett and Hacker reject this notion on the ground that introspection is not a quasi-perceptual faculty at all and is not a source of knowledge about the inner. They argue there is no more a mind's eye than there is a mind's ear, nose or tongue. In any case if we invoke the metaphor of the mind's eye, we speak of seeing in (not with) our mind's eye. To Bennett and Hacker, introspection is a form of reflexive thought-introspection or a matter of being attentive to one's moods and emotions, sensations and feelings. It is certainly not a form of perception, and, though a route to self-knowledge and self-understanding, it is one that is beset with the perils of self-deception.

Kim (1996) points out that no computer representation of "me" can account for all my psychological states and properties.[19] It certainly cannot account for consciousness, yet without consciousness, there would be no moral life as consciousness gives meaning to life.

Thomas Nagel (1974) views consciousness as the source of all our feelings, of what it is like to be human: to see with both eyes, to employ one's hands in eating, to appreciate music and the setting sun.[20] All conscious organisms have a private, interior life. We do not have a clue, Nagel argues, about what it might be like to be a bat because we have no idea of what it would be like to find our way around the world by sonar. Some have questioned whether this is completely true in an age where military personnel use sonar equipment but Bennett and Hacker are more generally critical in arguing that it is misconceived to claim we can come to grips with conscious experience in

terms of claiming there is something which it is like for a subject to have it. If we ask ourselves what is it is like for a human being to be human, it can amount to no more than a request to describe the life of a human being. This sheds no light on the nature of consciousness. They reject the Thomas Nagel claim that "we know what it is like for us to be us" in the sense of their being something precise that it is like for us to be us. Bennett and Hacker in turn reject the Searle assertion that, for any conscious state, "there is something that it qualitatively feels like to be in that state."

The Freudian view of the unconscious versus the current view of the adaptive unconscious

Before Freud, the unconscious was viewed as ancillary to consciousness. Freud claimed it was just the opposite in that the most important mental processes occur in the unconscious.[21] Wilson shares this opinion but uses the term "the adaptive unconscious" to stress that non-conscious thinking is an evolutionary adaptation, to distinguish it from Freud's unconscious which he regards as too limited a view. For Freud, the ego's function is to mediate between the external environment and the desires of the id and then between the id and the super-ego. Any failure by the ego to achieve satisfaction of the desires of the id leads to frustration, whereas failure to act in line with the dictates of the super-ego results in anxiety. The ego, according to Freud, is obliged to employ defense mechanisms to mask the representation of forbidden desires as it strives to control the three parts of the mind.

Wilson claims that Freud's greatest insight was in recognizing the pervasiveness of non-conscious thinking. This suggests that thinking is an attribute of the brain but as Bennett and Hacker say, it is not the brain that concentrates on doing an operation with due care but the surgeon. Neither is the brain the loci of thoughts . . . thoughts do not occur in the brain but in one's study, or as one walks down the street and so on. It is true to be sure that without very specific neural activities one could not think but equally, without very specific neural activities, one could not walk or talk either. But apart from looking at the non-conscious as some distinct entity and thinking as an attribute of the brain instead of the person (the mereological error), much depends on how we define thinking since cognitive thinking involves language, embracing many varieties of thinking. One can be interrupted in cognitive thinking, but does it make much sense to talk about interrupting non-conscious thinking?

In any case, what justifies Wilson's talking about Freud's limited view? Wilson sees a vast unconscious system, different from that imagined by Freud. He does not deny that there may be dynamic forces keeping unpleasant thoughts out of awareness as Freud's concept of repression claimed. But Freud believed that access to the unconscious was possible and saw the 'royal road' to the unconscious being through the analysis of dreams even if he often had to be content with less spectacular tools like projective techniques. In

contrast, Wilson claims the unconscious mind is closed to the conscious mind: a black box. This means his claims about the unconscious must rely on indirect evidence, much of it purely speculative. Bennett and Hacker regard the claim that much of what our brains do is "hidden from consciousness" as misleading in that, neurological experiments apart, *all* of what our brains do is "hidden from consciousness."

Where Wilson and Freud differ most is in the actual *functions* credited to the unconscious. Wilson credits the unconscious with functions most people would regard as the exclusive province of the conscious mind or, more correctly, to the conscious human being:

1 *Sizing up the world and warning of dangers.* The ability to by-pass the conscious mind so as to assess the environment quickly can on occasions be a matter of survival. This is in line with neuroscientists Antonio Damasio (1994)[22] and LeDoux (1997)[23] who claim the initial appraisal of things tied to our core concerns is non-conscious, and may be at variance with the more reflective (conscious) appraisal that occurs subsequently. Goleman (1998)[24] neatly summarizes the Damasio position:

> Damasio's conclusion was that our minds are not designed like a computer, to give us a neat printout of the rational arguments for and against a decision in life based on all the previous times we've faced a similar situation. Instead the mind does something much more elegant: it weighs the emotional bottom line from those previous experiences and delivers the answer to us in a hunch, a gut feeling. We could have no preferences, unless feelings enter into the pros and cons to establish the relative weight of each.
>
> (p.52)

The unconscious appraisal occurring in the first microsecond may stand, that is, the initial appraisal can be final. If an evaluation remains at the level of just 'gut' feel, we are likely to choose or reject on this basis. In other words, we may follow the *likeability heuristic*, just going along with that gut liking. This implies consumers can form instant attitudes which rules out the idea that attitudes must start with some conscious cognitive perception. In fact the very idea of attitude as a tripartite concept, being viewed as a sequence of cognitive ('learn'), evaluative ('feel') and conative ('do') or some other sequence of these three, is unsound. While learn, feel, and do can be separated conceptually, they are instantaneous. If data are emotionally charged, there is an immediate reaction favoring a position since, research suggests that, within milliseconds of our perceiving anything at all, we unconsciously assess (divorced from sober, rational reflection) whether we like it or not.

2 *Learning*. Although we think in terms of consciously making an effort to learn, a good deal of learning is unconscious. This ties with the view of *conditioning* occurring unconsciously. But this is controversial. It is now

commonly accepted that operant conditioning is unlikely to occur without some conscious awareness and that the label "operant conditioning" is no longer appropriate (Brewer, 1974).[25] On the other hand, *incidental* learning is a candidate for unconscious learning as it occurs without reward, effort or purpose as happens, say, in watching ads on television. There is also learning by *imitating* others. This may involve consciously copying, as viewers might copy some celebrity on TV, but it can be unconscious learning if the imitation is an after-effect of watching. Wilson quotes studies that show subjects non-consciously learning rules that are very difficult to learn consciously. We also learn unconsciously to like things that have become familiar. Thus the repeated exposure to a brand or ad for a brand leads to familiarity and with familiarity, other things remaining equal, comes an increased liking that occurs at the unconscious level (Zajonc, 1968).[26] On the other hand, we are apt to unconsciously filter out that which is of little interest or concern, with attention quickly shifting when something enters the environment which is of concern, just as people may shut out all the noise around them but come alive on the mention of their name.

3 *Setting goals.* Wilson quotes Bargh et al. (2001) that events in the environment can give rise to new goals and give direction to behavior, all outside of consciousness.[27] There is no doubt we can find ourselves strongly disposed to move in a certain direction. However, because unconscious forces press us in a certain direction, are we justified in claiming this is 'setting goals' to give direction to behavior? If we accept that the setting of goals is a purposive (not just purposeful) activity, it would follow that this can only be done deliberately, that is, consciously.

4 *Interpreting and evaluating.* Even when the conscious mind is occupied elsewhere, Wilson argues, the unconscious mind can be interpreting, evaluating and selecting information. Wilson points out that people have chronic ways of interpreting and evaluating situations and these interpretations and evaluations are the ones they commonly act upon. The question arises: what is the incidence of this occurring? After all, we can have 'gut' reactions that are not acted upon because the conscious mind comes into play to assess the wisdom of the impulse. It may be we are prepared to go along with most of our unconscious assessments but this is because most of them are inconsequential. Wilson, though, argues that, when it comes to reactions to others, first impressions emanating from unconscious evaluations are likely to prevail. These assessments may not be inconsequential but prevail because they are not in competition with rival conscious assessments at the time. This can lead to bias, say, in interviews and similar situations like selecting a service provider. Wilson, like many psychologists, uses the metaphor of the "immune system" in saying our psychological immune system uses a "feel good" criterion when it comes to interpreting and evaluating information. The psychological immune system is an appropriate label for the strong

psychological defenses that can be activated to help us feel better when things go wrong. The psychological immune system is applied to rationalize, discount, and limit all sorts of trauma. Wilson points out that people bias their interpretations to enhance a sense of well-being and this bias is built into the adaptive unconscious. If this is so, then the adaptive unconscious is in line with the conscious mind as people *consciously* interpret and evaluate in a way that most promotes their ego, viewpoint, and preferences (Gilovich, 1991).[28]

5 *Generating feelings.* Wilson argues that not only does the adaptive unconscious select what to consider, and then interprets and evaluates it but "it feels" (p.31). It is not quite clear what this means since we have no access to the unconscious to know whether it feels or not. If this is shorthand for saying the adaptive unconscious generates feelings, this we can accept with the proviso that it is people who select what to consider, interpret, and evaluate not the brain alone.

6 *Initiating action*. Wilson illustrates how the unconscious can initiate action quoting a well-known case reported by Clapare'de.[29] Each time Clapare'de, a physician, visited a woman with amnesia, she was unable to recall seeing him before so he had to reintroduce himself on every visit. On one occasion he concealed a pin in his hand which pricked her when they shook hands and this led her to withdraw her hand immediately. Next time he visited the woman she still did not recognize him but refused to shake his hand. This case is used to show how information can come from the unconscious, resulting in action being taken, without any conscious awareness of what is happening. Another demonstration (not quoted by Wilson) is found in attempts to get workers to break old skills so improved methods can be adopted. Mowrer (1960) showed that making a worker carry out the old skill in a conscious and deliberate way resulted in difficulties in remembering what was involved.[30] Thus men who wear bow ties and tie them themselves find the task difficult when asked to tie the bow tie slowly for others to imitate. A skill that has been delegated to unconscious control can be lost on consciousness and be made impassive in the unconscious by consciously trying to recall the skill.

Wilson acknowledges that his concept of the adaptive unconscious captures much that has roots in Freud in claiming that (i) lower-order mental processes occur outside consciousness; (ii) non-conscious processing can occur while the conscious mind is dealing with something else; (iii) the unconscious can make thinking habitual; (iv) the unconscious uses stereotypes to categorize and evaluate people and this can lead to prejudiced judgments; (v) the unconscious can generate feelings and preferences of which people are unaware; (vi) central parts of our personalities remain hidden in the non-conscious self so we do not have access to aspects of who we are.

Wilson's adaptive unconscious deviates from Freud, though, in arguing that the basic processes of perception, memory, and language comprehension

are in the unconscious and cannot be accessed by the conscious mind, not because this would be anxiety-provoking (as per Freud) but simply because these are not accessible to conscious awareness. This commits the mereological fallacy as it treats the unconscious as an entity or set of entities located in the brain. He further argues that judgments, feelings, motives, and so on occur outside of conscious awareness for reasons of efficiency, not because of repression as Freud claimed. Wilson is adopting an explanation in line with *evolutionary psychology*. This is not surprising as sociobiology or evolutionary psychology has a tendency to ignore the importance of nurture as opposed to nature to making us what we are. When this is taken too seriously, both cultural differences and the potential pliability and flexibility of humans is tossed aside. The extreme reductionism in sociobiology as expressed in E.O. Wilson's (1998) *Consilience*: *the Unity of Knowledge* is in danger of reducing all mental happenings to the promptings of the genes.[31]

Although Wilson's view of the unconscious, as not consisting of any single entity, leads him to reject the view of mind as a single "homunculus", the absence of any explanation of how the unconscious carries out its functions raises the specter of Gilbert Ryle's (1949) mocking, behaviorist rejection of the classical distinction between "mind" and "matter" (Cartesian dualism) as the dogma of "the Ghost in the Machine."[32] The adaptive unconscious seems to be a 'man in the machine' in terms of the functions attributed to it.

How the adaptive unconscious 'decides' priorities

How does the adaptive unconscious 'decide' what is important (and what is not) so as to allow priorities to be determined for example, whether to even look at the advertisement or brand? (This question would be regarded as just plain silly to Bennett and Hacker as it is people that decide, not some assumed system called the unconscious). Wilson argues that the concept of "accessibility" is the key and accessibility is tied to the potential of information in memory to be activated or energized. This depends on (a) the self-relevance of the information; (b) how recently the information has been entertained; and (c) how often the information has been used in the past since usage facilitates recall. Of course, whatever seriously concerns us is likely to have accessibility in that there is self-relevance in what concerns us and such concerns will have recently been thought about and often thought about in the past. Anything that seriously concerns us is the key factor in emotion generation (O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy, 2003)[33] so the adaptive unconscious is likely to be sensitive to emotional matters and give them accessibility.

The adaptive unconscious, according to Wilson, not only harbors stereotypes but also representations of specific people who, for better or worse, have influenced our lives. Thus if a consumer, for example, has a fond memory of a parent, he or she will have a positive reaction to those celebrities who are like that parent and vice versa. There may be a 'generalized' stereotype of

a mother, father, brother, and friend that may equally evoke positive reactions, at least much advertising assumes this is so.

Wilson suggests that the goals most important in life and embedded in the adaptive unconscious are the desire for affiliation (friendship, intimacy, mutual understanding), achievement (to do something better than has been done before), and power (concern for having a strong impact on others). These are, of course, the three need categories of human motives developed by McClelland and popularized in the 1960s in texts on organizational behavior.[34] McClelland assumed these motives were learnt (as opposed to being inborn) and that just one of these motives would dominate in any one individual, even if situational factors might operate to modify the reaction. Claiming these motives are learnt means they could arise through early conditioning. Although the idea of *unconscious* conditioning is now being challenged, it is still reasonable to assume that some conditioning is unconscious. (It may be students in experiments are aware of being conditioned but such awareness is less likely in other contexts and populations.) Wilson does not discuss conditioning but it is reasonable to assume that conditioning can be one way of influencing the non-conscious behavior.

While McClelland has been criticized for assuming just one dominant motive, the major criticism has revolved around the method (projective techniques, namely, the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT)) used in finding which motive dominates. In the TAT the subject is given a number of black and white pictures in various settings. Each is capable of being interpreted in many ways and the subject is asked to tell a story about each. These stories are analyzed for 'themes' introduced and the themes identified are assumed to tap the subject's deep needs/motives. Like all projective techniques, TAT assumes that interpreting a vague stimulus will generate what is most prominent in the mind or what is of most concern. Wilson like many in marketing, shows no qualms about the test's validity but argues the TAT assesses motives captured in the adaptive unconscious whereas self-report measures assess self-attribute motives or people's conscious theories about their needs that may differ from their non-conscious needs. Wilson is agreeing with those using projective techniques that this is one way in which the content of the unconscious might be leaked even if the conscious mind cannot directly access the unconscious. TAT is a way of investigating which motive is most likely to be dominant (affiliation, achievement or power) in our target audience. Ad appeals can be developed that cater to such motives while at the same time paying some attention to the motives which are self-attributed in answers to questionnaires. If no one dominant motive is found for the target audience, advertisers might appeal at various times to each of the three motives.

Wilson argues that the adaptive unconscious interprets and judges in a way that reinforces a view of the world that gives most pleasure, that is, the criterion at work is a 'feel good' criterion. However, this cannot be the whole story since people need to be realistic even if it does not make them feel

good. It would be silly for the adaptive unconscious to view a wild lion running towards its host as a sign of liking! Wilson later talks of promoting personal well-being which seems more apt. Thus, he argues, people promote their own sense of well-being by assessments that exaggerate their superiority to others. One implication here is that the adaptive unconscious is (we are) open to ads that reinforce the target audience's sense of well-being and superiority.

A solidarity appeal to the nation in general about that nation's superiority to other nations is a well-known propaganda device for enlisting support for narrow nationalism. But this desire to feel good about ourselves can be in conflict with the need for accuracy. Wilson in reply argues that accuracy tends to be sacrificed in the interests of self-deception if that self-deception helps us to maintain a positive view of ourselves and to be optimistic about the future. Hirstein (2004) agrees that normal people, rather than admit to not knowing, will often make up an answer and express it with complete conviction.[35] He explains it by arguing that the creative ability to construct a plausible answer and the ability to check that response are separate in the brain though it would be more accurate to say that an individual's construction of a plausible answer and the checking of that response often do not occur together.

Wilson claims that friends might be better at predicting our spontaneous behavior as this is likely to emanate from the unconscious while we ourselves are better at predicting behaviors which we control and monitor. This is an empirical proposition that needs research support but, like many such assertions, it is taken by Wilson to be a legitimate interpretation or inference based on his conceptualization of the role of the unconscious versus the conscious. Even though the unconscious is a black box, Wilson feels justified in saying that there are aspects of the self-concept that are located in the adaptive unconscious and other aspects in consciousness. As a consequence, there can be a conflict between unconscious motives and conscious motives that can lead to inconsistency in behavior and less emotional well-being. He argues that both the unconscious and the conscious are influenced by the cultural and social environment but the process differs in each case. Unfortunately, he does not elaborate on what those differences are.

Confabulation

Freud, as did Marx and Nietzsche, claimed that what people say they believe and want can be misleading. This is a theme highlighted by writers on the adaptive unconscious. Wegner (2002) points out that, when a neurologist causes a patient's limbs to jerk, patients often say they meant to move that limb and invent reasons why they might do so. Such post hoc invented explanations are termed 'confabulations' and are common in such circumstances. The term confabulation itself refers to making up details or an unconscious act in which falsification serves as a defense mechanism. If, as suggested,

confabulations are all-pervasive in social life, this has serious implications for any activity, like marketing research.

Wilson draws on neurological studies involving split brain patients carried out by Gazzaniga and LeDoux (1978) to illustrate how people simply make up reasons for their behavior when access to the real reasons is not available.[36] Gazzaniga and LeDoux argue that all of us are disposed to confabulate explanations, since the conscious verbal self (left hemisphere) often does not know why we do what we do and thus creates an explanation that makes most sense. Wilson endorses the 'hunch' of Gazzaniga and LeDoux that people often give explanations of their behavior without realizing their explanations are confabulations: "that our conscious selves often do not know the causes of our responses and thus have to confabulate reasons" (p.99). In particular, we are likely to confuse cause with non-causal antecedent, just as it can happen in the use of a placebo. Given Wilson's claim that much or even most, behavior is initiated by unconscious motives and unconscious understandings of the world and occurs without conscious monitoring, it would follow that the reasons given for our behavior will be largely confabulations. More specifically, given that many judgments, emotions, thoughts, and behaviors are produced by the adaptive unconscious and people do not have access to the unconscious, their conscious selves make up reasons for why they responded the way they did.

Pascal (1623–1662) illustrated confabulation by pointing out that, if someone arrives at a belief in God by choosing to be conditioned into it because he fears that there may be a Hell, he will also come to believe that it was the wisdom and benevolence of God that set him on the road to believing. People naturally seek a rational explanation of their behavior *when the behavior is not immediately understandable*. But this does not mean confabulations are the norm. People have a 'need' to feel they are in control of what they do and will invent reasons to satisfy that need but, accepting that this is so, does not give any license to claim that, in general, people's reasons for their behavior are inventions. As Malcolm (1977) says, the testimony that people give us about their intentions, thoughts, and feelings is the most important source of information we have about them and this self-testimony cannot be adequately supplemented by inferences from external and/or internal physiological variables.[37] He goes on to say that if we want to know what a man wants, what he is thinking about, whether he is annoyed or pleased or what he has decided, the man himself is our best source of information. It is difficult to see how people could survive if self-explanations of behavior were generally inventions. We typically accept that people believe what they say they believe, unless there is countervailing evidence to the contrary. The assumption that answers are not confabulations is basic to marketing research and to social life generally.

The usual criticisms of marketing research (including focus groups) pale by comparison against an attack that says the answers to questions about reasons for buying and so on are meaningless rationalizations. Since the Gazzaniga

and Ledoux quote was acknowledged to be *mere speculation*, Wilson backs his claim by quoting a study conducted by him and Nisbett where the students in the experiment reported that noise had lowered their enjoyment of a film when other evidence suggested it had not. Without being a participant it is hard to identify what contextual pressure was at work that is relevant to giving socially appropriate answers.

Even assuming unconscious imperatives trigger behavior without awareness, reasons given for that behavior need not be confabulated. People, and not only Sherlock Holmes, employ abduction to reason back from the context and from memory, to reason back to the best explanation. Wilson quotes George Kelly (1965) with approval. Yet it was George Kelly who viewed man as acting like a scientist: "Might not the individual man, each in his own personal way, assume more of the stature of a scientist, ever seeking to predict and control the course of events with which he is involved? Would he not have his theories, test his hypotheses, and weigh his experimental evidence?" (p.5)[38]

The real question is the extent to which dispositional pressures do in fact by-pass the conscious and evade evaluation and revision. Wilson raises the question but simply says that the adaptive unconscious is responsible for a "good deal" of our behavior while agreeing that people also possess a conscious self that directs behavior, "at least sometimes" (p.106). This last sentence shows a reluctance to credit much behavior to the conscious mind. Words like 'a good deal' suggest the adaptive unconscious predominates while 'at least at times' suggests consciousness has a minimal role. In terms of the evidence quoted by Wilson this is not justified. Wilson later seems to back off a bit in saying that there may be relatively few cases in which a response is the pure product of only the adaptive unconscious or only the conscious. If this is so, do they work in tandem or sequentially in that the conscious mind takes inputs from the unconscious to evaluate, reject or incorporate? Wilson is silent on this important question. He plays around with epiphenomenalism in saying that it may be that an unconscious "intention" causes both the behavior and the conscious thought which the subject assumes to be the cause or reason for his behavior.

In terms of his basic thesis and to use his own words, Wilson has a "chronically accessible trait" to see only the adaptive unconscious at work. What distinguishes human beings is their ability to think about possible alternatives, to reflect on them and evaluate them while using experience to think about consequences. Information may come to the mind 'from the adaptive unconscious' but this can be the raw data for thought. Our desires are not absolutely compelling though one would suspect unconscious urges might boost a favored candidate. It is in fact possible to find oneself taking action against one's wishes. In what is termed the 'Anarchic Hand Syndrome', patients find one of their hands performing goal-directed movements that they just cannot suppress, like undoing one's shirt buttons with one hand just after the other hand has done them up or taking leftovers off a neighboring diner's plate! Here actions seem to be determined by lower-level, unconscious

information processing mechanisms that override the conscious mind (Eilan and Roessler, 2004).[39]

Wilson speculates that despite the vast amount of information people have, he "suspects" their explanations of their responses are not any more accurate than explanations of a complete stranger who lives in the same culture. Without first documenting the full range of responses, this is a foolish thing to say. In any case much depends on what we mean by 'cause' which Wilson seems to think is unproblematic. In analyzing action alone, observers would find it next to impossible to deduce the reasons (both motives and beliefs) from the action alone. If, however, we are talking about known contextual *influences* (which on occasion can be decisive), the stranger may be as good as the individual but this (Humean) sense of cause can only be appropriately invoked where cause X and effect Y are contiguous in time and place. On the other hand, if we are taking account of both contextual factors and knowledge of a person's personality to simulate the total situation, it may be that observers can be good at explaining responses. But Wilson's 'suspicion' may amount to no more than his unconsciously favoring epiphenomenalism which pops up whenever there is doubt about the active intervention of the active, conscious mind. Perhaps Fodor (2003) is right when he says, "practically all experimental psychologists and philosophers of mind continue to be behaviorists of one kind or other. They have just ceased to notice that they are."[40]

Wilson endorses the notion of our having unconscious feelings that contradict conscious feelings. Surely is not the contradiction between feelings and expressed beliefs? Wilson supports his claim in saying: I may say I love my horse when in fact I may hate it. But is there not confusion here? When I say "I love my horse" I am simply expressing a *belief* which may or may not be true, not necessarily my feelings. Having 'emotions' can mean (a) having a latent disposition to have certain types of experience like having a latent disposition to love someone or (b) the experiences themselves. When we love a horse or house or car, the experience is not something ongoing all the time but something that is aroused on occasions. In other words, we are not constantly conscious of what we love. Hence we fall back, when asked, on our beliefs which may be colored by situational pressures. This is because emotional feelings are aroused by highly negative or positive appraisals of some action, event or attribute and we are not undertaking such appraisals all the time in front of a loved one. Although we cannot believe black is white just because we want to do so, beliefs can be held hostage on occasions to desire if there is no necessity to face reality. Often at any one moment we may not know what our beliefs are on any topic. Nonetheless we tend to eschew methods of acquiring beliefs which are completely unrelated to the likelihood of their being true since true beliefs are sought as a matter of survival.

Wilson argues that the adaptive unconscious might produce feelings independently of people's conscious constructions of their feelings. Again, surely it is constructions of people's *beliefs* about their feelings. He draws here on self-perception theory which asserts that people's beliefs and attitudes are

commonly determined by observation of their own behavior because, just as we judge the feelings of others from observing their behavior, we also infer our own attitudes from self-observation. Wilson draws on the well-known experiment in which the experimental group was injected with epinephrine which produces physiological arousal in the sympathetic nervous system. This group seemed to infer a certain film was the funniest on the ground that they laughed and smiled the most while watching it. But when the experimenters asked participants to rate how funny the film was and how much they enjoyed it, the responses of the experimental group were no different from the control group.

Wilson's interpretation of this experiment was that the adaptive unconscious inferred the film was funny because they laughed a lot but, when actually asked how funny the film was, people based their responses on their personal theories about their liking for this type of film: "the adaptive unconscious felt one way whereas people's conscious selves feel differently." (p.132) But did the student participants in the experimental group really believe they were simply injected with a vitamin compound as they were told? If a person finds himself laughing at a film, does his adaptive unconscious (we), of necessity, attribute it to the film being funny or does that person simply feel in a good mood and predisposed to laugh in order to experience a sense of sharing with the people around? In any case would not self-perception theory also predict that the conscious mind would note the behavior of laughing and conclude also that the film was funny? Self-perception theory is meant to explain how we might change attitudes or beliefs by first changing behavior rather than the other way round. But, if at the conscious level there is no change, the anticipated change in attitudes and beliefs might be stymied.

Related to self-perception theory is attribution theory. This asserts that people make inferences, from a person's behavior, about intentions and then attribute an underlying motive or cause, consistent with the behavior. This does not mean that we are necessarily good at attributing motive or cause, in that to understand another's action we need to know not only what action took place but also the wants and beliefs that lie behind that action and perhaps something about that person's personality. Of the three wants, beliefs, and actions, we need at least two out of the three to make a reasonable guess at the third. Nonetheless, it is true, as Fay (1996) says, other people may have an *overall* understanding of us better than we do ourselves since observers may see better than we do the relationship between our manifest feelings and external events or we may be self-deceived or be too involved or confused to see what is really happening.[41] There is also empathy which in psychiatry means 'feeling oneself into' in contrast with sympathy which is 'feeling with' (Sims, 1995).[42]

Sims, a psychiatrist, when seeking empathy, tells us he tries to create in his own mind what the subject's experience must be like. He then tests to see if he is correct in his reconstruction of the subject's experience, by asking him

to affirm or deny his description. He also uses his observation of the subject's behavior, for example, the expression on his face, to reconstruct the subject's experiences. He seeks reasons for behavior and quotes Wittgenstein (1953)[43] when he says that we explain human behavior by giving reasons, not causes. He accepts that it is not possible to empathize with what is happening in the unconscious as the patient cannot describe it. Interestingly, Sims accepts that his account of the patient's experiences may not always coincide with how the patient views his experiences, but seems to accept the patient's version as more likely to be true . . . unless the patient is under a delusion which Sims defines as an unshakable belief that is out of line with the patient's level of education.

Affective forecasting

Many, if not most, consumer decisions take account of anticipated emotional consequences. In trying to reach a buying decision consumers do have expectations about the emotional consequences of doing this rather than that. This topic is considered by psychologists under the heading of 'affective forecasting' (Gertner, 2003).[44] Wilson's work coheres with the work of other psychologists in suggesting that we tend to overestimate both the intensity and the duration of future emotional costs *and* future emotional rewards. Psychological adaptation occurs to minimize the intensity and duration. Wilson and his collaborators label the gap between what we anticipate and what we ultimately experience the "impact bias."

If the emotional consequences the consumer anticipates when making a decision commonly differ from those experienced when the product is bought, it suggests mistakes in affective expectations can steer the consumer into making mistakes in choosing what the consumer thinks will give most satisfaction. In this sense consumers do not always know what they really want. We 'miswant' in that we may dream of that special holiday and find we miss the routines of everyday life. Affective forecasting involves 'durability biases' in a tendency to overestimate the duration of positive or negative reactions to likely events in the future. This overestimating serves the function of motivating us to take action. In buying, the duration of the pleasure from any purchase, tends to be less than expected. Similarly, people cannot dwell on some loss or disappointment for ever. But do not losses and deep disappointments in purchases give rise to recurrent recalls of the emotion as certain disappointments leave emotional scars, lasting longer than physical ones? Losses and disappointments that have a strong emotional impact, like being denied an expected promotion, have greater staying power than corresponding gains like achieving a promotion (Frijda, 1988).[45] Humiliations suffered can plague us and be relived throughout life so it is not all that clear what is meant by saying an emotion will not last as long as expected. It is often harder to forget than it is to remember. If we are emotionally affected by the failure of a product to come up to expectations, this impacts our sense of

ourselves as wise shoppers. We feel a loss more than an equivalent gain, that is, the staying power of that emotion is longer than that arising from some corresponding gain. This is not to deny, however, that we, if asked at the time, may typically overestimate the duration of both our joy and grief.

If the adaptive unconscious has its own preferences which cannot be accessed directly, consumers cannot undertake introspection to discover the major product attributes sought nor their weightings for relative importance. (We will ignore the mereological fallacy here.) Hence Wilson's dismissal of models such as the multi-attribute model on the ground that people are not fully aware of their preferences in advance. Consumers' reasons may not fully capture *the* reasons at work and they may be misled in following a procedure of listing attributes sought, weighting them for importance and arriving at some overall relative score for the various alternatives considered. Wilson quotes Goethe (1749–1832) with approval: "He who deliberates lengthily will not always choose the best."

Wilson 'tests' Goethe's hunch in a study of people engaged in choosing some work of art. Those who analyzed, as a way of discovering why they liked or disliked each of the five art posters, seemed to lose sight of which of the five they really liked best. Although we agree with Wilson in his dismissal of the multi-attribute model, this study is a poor support for that dismissal since, when liking is the sole criterion for preference, there is no further reason for preference beyond the feelings evoked (feelings don't have physical properties like a product does). If consumers are asked to provide reasons, these reasons can do no more than state the type of enjoyment expected for example, "I found the picture beautiful": an answer that would not tell the questioner why the consumer likes what he likes.

Intuition

Wilson asks us to distinguish between informed and uninformed gut feelings. The trick, he tells us is to gather enough information to develop an informed gut feeling and then refrain from analyzing that feeling too much. (This is commonly what consumers in fact do!) Wilson claims we should let our adaptive unconscious undertake the job of forming reliable feelings and then trust those feelings, even if we cannot explain these feelings entirely. This allows the adaptive unconscious (us) to make a stable, informed evaluation rather than an ill-informed one. This is quite an endorsement of those who advocate going along with intuition or gut feel when making decisions ("The heart has its reasons which reason does not know" Pascal). But in this connection, is not trusting these feelings equivalent to falling back on one's values in that in a final analysis values determine the nature of the tradeoffs (de Sousa, 1990).[46]

Miller and Ireland (2005) view intuition as utilizing holistic hunch and automated expertise and argue it is capable of providing benefits but only when firms are emphasizing exploration.[47] Intuition may simply be inferences from some store of knowledge of which we are not conscious. In

Plato's theory of recollection (or anamnesis), learning is essentially recalling into consciousness innate knowledge. Although no one claims today that, in solving problems, we seek to regain knowledge we *innately* possess, intuition is derived from non-conscious knowledge. Goldberg (2004) views intuition as the condensation of prior experience and the result of condensed analytic processes.[48] The expert, using intuition, bypasses the logical steps precisely because intuition is a condensation of the extensive use of such orderly logical steps in the past. The conventional view from the study of adults with brain damage is that the left side or hemisphere of the brain embraces language functions while the right side embraces visual-spatial reasoning with the two hemispheres communicating via a bundle of fibers termed the corpus callosum. But Goldberg in addition claims that the left hemisphere is the repository of compressed knowledge and pattern-recognition capacities, allowing a person to deal with familiar situations, the right hemisphere is the novelty hemisphere, the explorer of the unknown and the uncharted. He also argues that it is the right hemisphere that is dominant when we are young but the right hemisphere loses out to the left hemisphere as we age since it is the left side that accrues an expanding 'library' of efficient pattern-recognition devices. Hence the title of his book: *The Wisdom Paradox: How the Mind Can Grow Stronger as Your Brain Grows Older.*

Intuition can be said to invade the conscious mind with an 'unreasoned' answer which is not necessarily short of rationality. Gigerenzer et al. (1999) demonstrate how fast decision-making can be as accurate as those strategies that try to use all the information available.[49] Klein (2003) shows that experienced workers, even when under extreme pressure, call up an action plan that is rational by drawing on experience to identify familiar patterns in the problems with which they are faced.[50] At the conscious level, the workers simply run a quick mental simulation to confirm the intuitive plan is a good one. With experienced workers, typically it is a good decision. This seems 'unreasoned' unless we accept that thinking involving interpretation, evaluation and suggested action can occur in deliberations not only in the conscious mind but also in the unconscious. If so, this implies dual processing: the conscious and the non-conscious. While interpretation, evaluation, and action evoke the notion of conscious rational thinking, the conscious mind also indulges in undirected fantasy-thinking, like daydreaming, and imaginative thinking which harnesses fantasy and memory to create plans and ideas (Fish, 1967).[51] Does the unconscious also do these things? Intuition can work well on occasions since it can be based on lots of past information and experience but this is not always so and it needs a reality check as to desirability, feasibility and commercial viability, rather than just going along regardless, as Wilson seems to suggest. Myers (2002) marshals the relevant research and concludes that intuition can help us empathize with others, perform rote tasks like driving and so on but it can also be perilously wrong.[52] We should not forget that it was following his 'gut feelings' that led Einstein to reject quantum mechanics! Also is Wilson being consistent when talking about the

adaptive unconscious making stable, informed evaluations? After all, is this not the same adaptive unconscious that focuses on the here-and-now and biases interpretations and evaluations? If this is so, why should gathering all the relevant information lead to a stable, informed evaluation? Also is this not the same adaptive unconscious that commonly (not just occasionally) bypasses the conscious mind in inducing behavior? If this is so, how can the conscious mind insist on gathering all the relevant information?

The importance of considering the conscious

We might distinguish awareness and consciousness in that when we are asleep we are still conscious but unaware of what is happening around us. This distinction is important in that some in marketing suggest consciousness implies awareness. Wilson and others who write on the adaptive unconscious make great claims for the amount of work carried out by the unconscious. But it is never a matter of how much work is done but the nature of the work done; quantity is not the issue but significance. The basic question is whether promoting a theory of the adaptive unconscious as something so powerful, which Wilson does, explains the agreed facts and findings using fewer assumptions than a theory where the conscious rational mind is dominant? At least for the unconverted, Wilson's experiments are merely suggestive at best. But never crucial. All too often the explanations 'make sense' because they confine themselves to just a subset of the relevant facts to be explained. We would agree with Stroll (2004) when he concludes that "rationality depends on conscious apprehension and cannot exist independently of it" (p.58).[53]

If Wilson has more powerful justifications for his claims, they need to be described and defended in the body of the text. The ones he quotes are not impressive. Talk about their being many other studies will not do since they may simply amount to replications when a theory needs to be tested by drawing out many different consequences for testing while taking account of rival explanations. There is lack of recognition by Wilson that theory testing needs to be comparative. He is still tied to Popper's hypothetico-deductive method of conjecturing a hypothesis, drawing out all the testable consequences and seeing if these testable consequences are corroborated.[54] But it is no longer good enough to focus on a single theory and confirm that the evidence corroborates the consequences of that theory. Instead we need to test comparatively since things ignored, but in need of explanation, only become evidentially relevant when a rival theory can account for them. This was dramatically demonstrated by Feyerabend (1962) in one of his earlier papers on thermodynamics.[55] Not only should theories be evaluated against rival theories or hypotheses but what might count as evidence in the evaluation may depend heavily on which rival theories are also being evaluated (Brown, 2001).[56]

Those who focus on consciousness stress thought experiments, carried out by manipulating concepts. We are capable of entertaining a myriad of

thoughts whose combinations can lead to novel thoughts. Conceptual understanding, and even new understandings altogether can be achieved through thought experiments. This requires the imagination to conjure up images, and contemplate and fantasize about unexperienced enjoyments. Thus we can instantaneously find it pleasant to think along the lines that an ad wants us to, to thinking how pleasant it would be to possess product X, and then to actually choose X. All this Wilson ignores. Although Skinner (1976) regarded mental states like beliefs, wants, and intentions as epiphenomena, in his biography he tells how he wanted to be a writer but, on realizing that he did not have the talent to be a great writer, opted to become a psychologist.[57] Noting this we might well ask how could Skinner argue that his beliefs and feelings had no influence on his going to Harvard to study psychology? It is through simulations in the conscious mind that we achieve the most innovative thinking: nothing is said by Wilson about this.

Because Wilson fails to demonstrate any strict functional differences between the conscious and the unconscious, everything associated with the conscious is free to be classed as belonging also to the unconscious with only intuitive reservations restraining Wilson from the view that the conscious can be eliminated altogether. But whatever input is received from the unconscious by the conscious, it is no longer under unconscious control and can be reasoned about leading to new wants and beliefs, leading to intentional action. Not surprisingly, Wilson makes no mention of decision-making in the sense of a deliberative conscious processing of the pros and cons of choosing one option rather than another. If Wilson achieves a predicted result he appears satisfied. But it is not only a question of prediction. A compelling explanation is more significant. As David Deutsch (1997), a physicist, says "prediction is not the purpose of science, it is part of the characteristic method of science" (p.6). "Whereas an incorrect prediction automatically renders the underlying explanation unsatisfactory, a correct prediction says nothing at all about the underlying explanation. Shoddy explanations that yield correct predictions are two a penny."[58] (p.65).

While by no means fully endorsing self-perception theory, Wilson argues that there are many occasions when what we feel is by no means clear and it is then that we act like observers and decipher feelings and attitudes from observing our own behavior. Bennett and Hacker do not agree but argue we do not express a belief, admit or confess that we believe this or that on the basis of the evidence of our behavior, and we do not wait to hear what we say in order to find out what we think because we can introspect and say how things are without observing what we do and say. This is generally so though there are occasions where observing our behavior (towards a member of the opposite sex) may tell us something of which we were not aware.

Observing our own behavior Wilson regards as a good strategy if it reveals feelings of which we were previously unaware and a poor strategy is if it results in the fabrication of feelings. He claims that most experiments

on self-perception theory typically result in self-fabrication in people misunderstanding the real reason for their behavior and making mistaken inferences about their feelings. Nonetheless he argues that, if we want to change the inclinations of the adaptive unconscious, we should induce behavior change first: changing our behavior to fall in line with conscious conceptions of ourselves is an effective way to bring about changes in the adaptive unconscious. In other words, follow the adage of being true to oneself. What matters is that people should commit themselves to a coherent self-narrative about themselves that corresponds well to their adaptive unconscious. It is not clear how we can say what changes in the unconscious have occurred when we have no access to it or to say how our self-narrative is going to correspond to what is in the adaptive unconscious. There is a faith here that changing our behavior will bring in line the adaptive unconscious.

An alternative conceptualization of the unconscious

What are the alternative conceptualizations of the unconscious? Searle's (1992) is the most well known. He puts forward a different notion of the unconscious that makes the unconscious less of a mystery. Searle accepts that the world consists exclusively of physical phenomena and that mental states are caused by neurobiological processes in the brain. His own position he calls one of "biological naturalism" which holds that brains "cause" minds and minds are higher-level features of the brain. But he rejects the claim that consciousness is an epiphenomenon. Thus he says that if he decides to raise his arm, it goes up and that no neurobiologist or psychologist is going to convince him that there is no causal relationship. Just because consciousness is realized in a system made up of neurons does not mean that consciousness is epiphenomenal. Searle claims that the brain is a biological machine that can think or compute which Bennett and Hacker regard as committing the mereological fallacy since it is people, not brains, that think. The mereological fallacy is implicit in the following comments of Searle but, as with Wilson, nothing is lost by substituting 'individual' for brain.

Searle while agreeing that, at any given moment, most of our mental states including beliefs, wants, values, and memories are unconscious, argues that unconscious mental states are simply features of the brain that are capable of *causing* that state to be in conscious form. He puts forward what he calls the "connection principle" which asserts, on logical grounds, that for a mental state to be an unconscious *mental* state, it must be the sort of thing that could in principle be conscious. This is because every intentional state has an 'aspectual shape' which means it represents its conditions of satisfaction under some aspects and not others. Thus representing what is desired under the aspect 'water' is a different aspectual shape from representing the same substance under the aspect H_2O even though water and H_2O are identical. There is no way of making sense of an aspectual shape of an intentional state except in terms of consciousness or accessibility to consciousness.

Searle says that, when any particular mental state is entirely unconscious, that state is in the form of neurophysiological states and processes. Mental life thus consists of just two features: subjective consciousness and the neurobiological states and processes. If an intentional state like a want, belief, intention, and so on does have a determinate aspectual shape, it is the sort of thing that could be brought into consciousness as conscious thought and action. When we refer to unconscious intentional mental states, it implies that we are talking about the capacity of the brain to produce conscious thoughts and action. All talk of unconscious mental states and processes is talk about *dispositional* states, that is, we are disposed to believe this or want that while all talk about unconscious mental states that are in principle inaccessible to consciousness can be shown to be incoherent. There is no intervening level of computation between the conscious and the neurobiological. In any case when we speak of acting for a motive we are saying we acted 'for the sake of' and this is what sets apart the motive explanation from one that rests on the concept of dispositional state. Even if the evidence suggests that someone acts in a dispositional way, we would still be justified in asking about the motive that led to the action (Wright, 1976).[59]

Searle, like most others, accepts the notion of perception giving rise to mental representations or images. Bennett and Hacker claim this is nonsense. They argue that representational theories conceptualize the mind as having entry to mental representations but there can be no such thing as the brain representing information; it is simply not intelligible to assume there can be symbolic descriptions of the visual scene in the brain. There is no such thing as a description or internal representation in the brain: "A pattern of neural firing that is a causal response to a stimulus in the visual field is not a description of the stimulus or anything else. For patterns of neural firings are no more symbols than are rings in the trunk of an oak tree, or molecules in a material subjected to carbon dating . . . A symbol is used only if the user means something by it—but brains cannot mean anything." (pp.145/146) Bennett and Hacker claim "the term 'representation' is a weed in the neuroscientific garden, not a tool—and the sooner it is uprooted the better." (p.143) Cognitive neuroscientists must stop referring to neural correlates of features in the visual scene as either 'representations' or 'symbols' and not base their explanations of perceptual processes by espousing the mereological fallacy.

Conclusion

A renewed interest in the unconscious is welcome but there are good reasons for believing that the claims currently being made are going much too far. Wilson fails to distinguish between the assertions which have considerable backing and assertions that merely reflect his own speculations based on his commitment to a certain psychological perspective. Too often his evidence is wanting while the very idea of considering alternative explanations seems foreign to his thinking.

In his article "*Objectivity, Value Judgment and Theory Choice*" Kuhn sought to move away from accusations that his book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* claimed choosing among paradigms or theories was a species of non-rational choosing. Kuhn in response introduced five criteria for preferring one theory over another: empirical accuracy; consistency; broadness of scope; simplicity; and fruitfulness.[60] In other words, Kuhn was arguing that there were good evidential reasons for choosing one theory over another. What Kuhn was claiming is that basic research paradigms are not themselves generally derivable from observed data and this claim is still endorsed. Conceptual understanding, and even new understandings altogether can be achieved through thought experiments.

Kuhn's criteria for preferring one theory over another may or may not be at odds with his original position, but they are useful for judging the present state of knowledge on the adaptive unconscious. Wilson's view certainly has broadness of scope but, as this paper has shown, the evidence is not strong on the other five criteria.

Laudan (1977) distinguishes between pursuing and accepting a theory and argues any theory is worth pursuing if we think it promising and worth further research.[61] It will be promising or progressive if it makes the occasional correct and novel prediction. The work so far on the adaptive unconscious would make it worthy of further investigation bearing in mind the need to avoid the mereological error. But social scientists are still grappling with the extent of our freedom of choice. Steven Pinker (2003) has made the case for the importance of genes in shaping behavior and rejects all claims that the mind is a tabula rasa (blank slate) free of any genetically induced behaviors.[62] According to Pinker, the blank slate has served as sacred scripture for political and ethical beliefs. (Personally, we have never met any professional psychologist who believes the mind is a blank slate since the decline of behaviorism.) If the influence of the genes is ignored, it is because it is a more actionable position to assume human minds are all equal, just as the economist might assume pure competition without believing there is any such thing. All of us must accept that the biochemical machinery, of which we are made, sets limits on how we think and behave.

The question arises as to the relationship between the genes and the unconscious. Pinker sees the genes as dominant in personality, gender, intelligence, and many other things that Wilson credits to the unconscious. Is it simply that the adaptive unconscious can be reduced to gene determination? Not entirely since Pinker in his commitment to a Darwinian science of mind argues our minds are partly "hardwired" at birth and this hardwiring underlies many universal forms of behavior. Being 'hardwired' at birth endorses the nativist thesis that every mind contains elements of knowledge that are not derived from experience. It is a thesis that opposes radical empiricism and gets support from Chomsky's work and the claims of many cognitive scientists. Nativism argues that every person has an endowment of innate ideas like ideas about language or geometry. The focus is purely on innate ideas

which is not the same as having innate instincts or innate drives. This still leaves open the question of whether innateness and genetic determination are the same. The question has still to be answered since innateness and what is in the genes have never been satisfactorily explicated. Neurology, including the unconscious, is determined by the genes but in ways no one as yet understands. The genetic contribution is expressed in physiological structures which are capacities that are necessary for all else. This adaptive unconscious may be a repository of psychological dispositions like dispositions to think in certain ways with environmental variables determining what will evoke the pre-programmed dispositions. Pinker's book is polemical with a certain slight of hand through first identifying behavior that might conceivably have an evolutionary origin and then, since this implies a tie to genes, claiming it is indeed genetic.

Matt Ridley (2003) argues that the study of the human genome has shown that genes respond to experience on the ground that some genes are not permanently off or on but get switched on or off by experience given that the proteins in our brain change with experience.[63] On these grounds, nature and nurture cannot be separated: it is no longer nature versus nurture but nature via nurture. Ridley, like Pinker, is a nativist but in claiming something is evolutionary in origin there is a need to distinguish whether the origin is likely to be through Darwinian mutation (adaptation) or Darwinian selection, since mutation suggests something sudden while selection suggests some gradual process.

Wilson does not see the adaptive unconscious as a set of innate dispositions or gene-determined responses but as subject to change through inputs to the mind. Wilson shares with behaviorists their dismissal of introspection. As Lyons (2001) says, introspection was a favored method of early experimental psychology, defined as a sort of inner observation by means of an inner, non-sensory capacity for observation.[64] This view, as we have seen, is rejected by Bennett and Hacker as a fiction. They view introspection as a form of reflexive thought or a matter of paying attention to moods and emotions. In early experimental psychology introspection was the method for obtaining data about the mind but later to be dismissed by the behaviorists as non-scientific, not being objective in the sense of not being amenable to experiments which could be checked for accuracy by others.

J. B. Watson (1878–1958), the founding father of behaviorism, dismissed introspection as "subjective psychology." Along with this rejection of introspection went a refusal to consider 'consciousness' and the 'inner life' as a proper subject for scientific investigation. In philosophy, Gilbert Ryle (1949) argued, like those currently promoting self-perception theory (which can be regarded as a subbranch of attribution theory), that we find out about ourselves as we find out about other people.[65] For Ryle (1949), the philosopher, the word 'mind', as a set of special faculties, is a myth since mind is no more than a set of dispositional tendencies. Mind is nothing more for Ryle than a set of dispositions. However, behind a disposition

surely lies some sort of brain structure. Ryle 'solves' this problem by essentially ignoring it.

Wittgenstein, the philosopher, pointed out that the human world was a world constructed through language and it is difficult to conceive any sort of mental deliberation without the use of language as it is language that provides the concepts that give us the categories by which we structure the world as a basis for any sort of thinking.[66] Bennett and Hacker, in going along with this, argue that language extends the intellect and makes it possible to deploy thoughts to form reasoned inferences and to justify beliefs on the basis of that reasoning as well as widening the range of emotions to include those of self-assessment like guilt and shame.[67] It would be impossible to have complexity in thinking without language.

What about the Whorf hypothesis that claims that language determines our thinking and actions?[68] After a period of denial that this could be the case, there is now evidence that language not only influences thought but also can in effect determine thought, at least abstract thought. This is what is being suggested in the work of psycholinguist Peter Gordon.[69] His work among a tiny tribe in the Amazon jungle, that does not posses words for numbers beyond two, demonstrates that their ability to conceptualize numbers is no better than that among pigeons, chimps or infants. Anything requiring cognitive manipulation of numbers is beyond them. It seems that without a language for numbers people do not develop the ability to perceive exactly any numbers above two. If thinking occurs in the adaptive unconscious, does it mean there is a separate language for doing so? There is no 'neutralize' as Bennett and Hacker point out.

The last word might go to O'Hear (2001) who makes a different claim in arguing: "We cannot act as if we are not conscious choosers, and as if most of our beliefs and decisions are not what they seem. We can, of course, admit that sometimes we are self-deceived . . . . Our dealings with others depend on our reacting to them as if they are instigators of their actions, and that, on the whole, they know what they are doing and saying, and that they have reasons for what they say and do . . . . By contrast there would be no social life if we discounted the reasons people have for what they do and their normal understanding of their institutions, for we would not be treating each other as persons, but rather as objects in some causal process over which we and they have no real insight or control" (pp.110/111).

PART II

Postmodernism

The attack on all aspects of rationality and modernity

3 The claims made by postmodernism

Introduction

Part I dealt with the attack on belief in free will and the claim that what we take to be the work of conscious deliberation is the result of unconscious causes lying behind whatever we do. Of course, we are constrained from acting completely in accordance with wants and beliefs by our resources, ability and access to opportunities. But we still believe we are free agents though we might be prepared to underwrite compatibilism—that free action is compatible with the belief that all events are nonetheless caused. However, it may well be that the unconscious does act on occasions as a gatekeeper for what is recalled in memory, as we consider the pros and cons in deciding whether to go this way or that. But whatever is recalled or enters into the mind through the senses can be churned over to reach new beliefs, wants, and actions. We are free agents, within very broad limits, and morally responsible if we choose to be so.

Part II is a different type of attack on what we believe about ourselves. It is an attack on our 'pretensions' to rationality and our notions of accessing Reality as it is. Postmodernism is in fact a radical perspective on the way we interpret the world. It is a perspective that undermines faith in reason as the basis of progress and casts doubts on our ability to make reliable decisions and share judgments. Philosopher Galen Strawson (2002) sums up postmodernism as follows.[1]

(Postmodernists) "say the strangest things. They say that there is no such thing as the way the world is, considered as it is in itself—that is, independent of ourselves and our concepts. They say that the idea of objectivity, the idea that science aims at and sometimes attains the truth about how things are, is incoherent—a foolish bauble left over from the babyhood of thought. They say that all we really do, when we do science, is spin a great system of sentences, and although we like to think these sentences state how things are, we are wrong. The sentences play only with one another, they don't connect to reality, they're not made true or false by the way the world is. According to Richard Rorty, one of the high priests of this church, 'only a sentence can be relevant to the truth of another sentence'. So don't appeal to the way the world is, for there is no such thing" (p.12).

This is not such an unfair description of the dominant French version of postmodernism even if it selects the assertions of postmodernism most likely to exasperate readers. We review the arguments that lead to such claims to see if there is something of merit that can be salvaged. This review forces us to examine things we take for granted in undertaking marketing inquiries and doing social science generally. There is analogy with radical skepticism. Harman (1973) claims that much of current epistemology (the theory of knowledge) in philosophy is best viewed as a response to the thesis of radical skepticism: that we never have the slightest reason to believe anything.[2] The only direct knowledge we have consists of our subjective sensations and it is conceivable that nothing outside this 'experiencing' exists. He distinguishes radical skepticism from the valid claim that nothing can be known for certain: that we can never be *absolutely* sure of anything. Radical skepticism denies that anything is even the slightest bit more likely to be true than anything else. All is opinion and opinions change all the time. Montaigne in 16th century France was a skeptic (though not always apparent), arguing that giving up all pretenses that human reason can reach truth, man is ready for the reception of divine grace! Another 16th century Frenchman, Descartes was perhaps the most famous skeptic of all in arguing that only one thing was certain: namely, that nothing is certain. The only proposition that can stand the skepticism of doubt is expressed in his famous formula: Cogito, ergo sum ("I think, therefore I am"). Radical skepticism is always in danger of promoting solipsism, the doctrine that the individual human mind has no basis for believing in anything!

It is not that there are lots of radical skeptics who need to be convinced that they are wrong. The problem lies in coming to grips with the line of argument that leads to radical skepticism. Commonsense laughs at radical skepticism but the problem is to show what is wrong with the reasoning which leads to radical skepticism. In showing where the reasoning goes wrong, a deeper understanding of epistemological issues arises. Sometimes, too, in this process, new truths are revealed. Similarly with postmodernism: we need to assess the arguments supportive of postmodernism and how postmodernism makes us re-examine what we take for granted. In the process of this re-assessment we discover deficits in our claims and methods.

Both radical skepticism and postmodernism are able to defend many 'wild' assertions because, as we go back and question our assumptions and the assumptions behind these assumptions, there comes a point where some assumptions just have to be accepted a priori. A priori propositions are justified independently of any appeal to empirical evidence but purely by appeal to thought alone (Bonjour, 1998).[3] David Hume (1711–1776), who believed that certainty over what are the 'facts' was unattainable, insisted that all a priori justifications will concern only relations of ideas (concepts) as opposed to matters of fact. In line with this many claimed a priori justification to be only manifested in logic and mathematics. But Bonjour (1998) shows how a repudiation of all a priori justification amounts to the repudiation of

reasoning generally. In a final analysis, as we go back to justify a justification and then justify that justification, we reach a stage where reasoning tells us some things must be accepted a priori. A priori beliefs are just taken-for-granted (e.g. everything which exists is material (physical) in character or every effect must have a cause), so we are thrown off balance if someone questions these beliefs. It is the case with postmodernism: we have never before had to defend what postmodernists attack.

Coming to grips with postmodernism is also analogous to a problem encountered in arguing with *logical* positivists in the 1920s, to the 1950s. If we entered into arguments with logical positivists involving excursions into ethics or religion, the logical positivist would just rule out discussion on the ground that ethical or religious propositions were not verifiable, just nonsensical. Similarly, if we ask card-carrying postmodernists to justify their claims by quoting the relevant evidence, they would answer that they reject the very concept of evidence in the context. Postmodernists ignore or reject opposing viewpoints on the ground that they are couched in a 'modernist' mode of reasoning that they reject. Inconsistencies abound in postmodernism without the postmodernist feeling obliged to deal with them. One of the most egregious is the denial by postmodernists of universal claims or authoritative truth while at the same time implicitly claiming that postmodernists' core pronouncements are universally valid. Of course, without making universal claims, postmodernists would have had less of an impact, just as Freud, in saying *all* dreams involve secret wishes and fears, made more of an impact than simply saying *some* dreams involve secret wishes and fears. Nonetheless postmodernism's advent has not been all negative. For one thing it has made us reflect far more about the process by which we go about relating to the world and reaffirmed, in a dramatic way, what all marketers, not narrowed by rational choice theory, know all too well, that language is not a transparent and neutral medium.

Postmodernism: background concepts

While the foundations of postmodernism, as Breisach (2003) shows, have a long history,[4] the actual term 'postmodernism' was coined by the American Marxist critic Fredric Jameson to embrace a whole host of ideas that together claimed to represent a new phase in Western culture.[5] It entered into architectural writing in the 1950s to describe a move away from shiny machine-like edifices. It later came to cover a whole sweep of criticisms of modernity (Harvey, 1989).[6] Not that writers associated with postmodernism speak with one voice. As Stephen Brown says, "For the cynical, indeed, the only discernible point of consensus among postmodernists is their lack of consensus on postmodernism."[7] Jane Flax (1990), a sympathetic writer on postmodernism, provides a flavor of this lack of consensus but also shows what unites them.[8]

"The persons and modes of thinking aggregated under the category of postmodernism are quite heterogeneous in regard to voice, style, content and

concerns. Jacques Derrida, Richard Rorty, Jean-Francois Lyotard, and Michel Foucault are four particularly influential writers associated with postmodernism. Yet each writer's focus and the salience he assigns to certain issues differ... Although internally varied, postmodernist discourses *are* unified in identifying certain subjects of conversation as particularly appropriate to and necessary for 'our' time. These crucial subjects include: (1) contemporary Western culture—its nature and the best ways to understand it; (2) knowledge—what it is, who or what constructs and generates it, and its relations to power; (3) philosophy—its crisis and history, how both are to be understood, and how (if at all) it is to be practiced; (4) power—if where, and how domination exists and is maintained and how and if it can be overcome; (5) subjectivity and the self—how our concepts and experiences of them have come to be and what, if anything, these do or can mean; and (6) difference—how to conceptualize, preserve, or rescue it" (p.188).

Postmodernism has no agreed definition. In philosophy it often substitutes for what are only elements of postmodernism like Derrida's deconstruction or associated concepts like poststructuralism. In academic courses, postmodernism crosses disciplines like cultural studies, science studies, post-colonial studies and feminist studies. Readings on postmodernism draw freely from authors such as Derrida, Foucault, Baudrillard, Julia Kristeva, and Lyotard (Lechte, 1994).[9]

Postmodernism announces the exhaustion of 'Modernity' as inaugurated by the Enlightenment with its goal of making reason the absolute ruler of human life. But the foundational thesis of postmodernism, from which much else follows, comes under the heading of the 'linguistic turn'. The *linguistic turn* in social science asserts there is no apprehending of reality except through the intervention of language because all perceptions, concepts, and claims to truth are constructed in language. Under the linguistic turn, language becomes the main component of thought. It was the philosopher Wittgenstein who argued that it was the possession of language that distinguished humans from all other animals. Without language we would just act on instinct. Since the only way we can understand ourselves is through language, our concept of self is a creation of language. Wittgenstein invented the phrase "language game" to draw attention to the fact that language cannot be detached from the activities of which it is part. But if it is language that distinguishes humans from other animals, it is also the use of language that has facilitated our rationality and intellectual achievements. It is difficult to see how the attack by postmodernists on rationality would elevate language. If all reasoning is simply cultural rationalization, then presumably so is the whole of the postmodernist philosophy!

The term "linguistic turn" was first given its airing in Richard Rorty's (1968) edited volume: *The Linguistic Turn: Recent Essays in Philosophical Method*.[10] In this book, everything is viewed as a *text* to be interpreted, not something to be checked against an objective reality as it is denied there is any such thing. Language is not to be viewed so much as a conveyor of

meaning but as a creator of meaning. The linguistic turn claims that the primary way in which human beings know the world, and interact with it, is through the medium of language, and different (cultural) linguistic ways of expressing thought give different shapes and constructions to that thought which, in turn, evokes different senses of reality. This is something different from acknowledging that science has a different view (perspective) on reality. The layperson views tables and chairs as solid objects but physicists claim that in reality they are clusters of invisible electrical particles mostly inhabiting empty space.

Postmodernism accepts what it terms *dereferentialism* or the claim that there is no non-linguistic (extralinguistic) reality because everything is mediated by language. The linguistic turn denies conscious thought captures any reality that is extralinguistic. For instance, in whatever way we describe a product, that description is a linguistic reality only: there are many rival descriptions, none of which can be said to capture *the essence of any reality 'out there'*. If reality 'out there' were accessible, it would be composed of elements of change and continuity: a non-accessible reality, on the other hand, allows the postmodernists to claim there is only a semiotic world of signs and symbols which are in a constant state of flux (change). This is a throwback to early Greek philosophy which tended to emphasize change rather than stability. Once the world 'out there' is seen as separate from the words we employ to talk about it, the world of words becomes the only reality. If there is only a world of words, the world is purely a human construction. If the world is a human construction of signs and symbols, it is a semiotic world better studied by semiotics. In this world, language is no longer a neutral medium between the mind and an outside reality but is the only accessible reality. Language as the only accessible reality is a semiotic world of flux as linguistic relationships shift. It implies the rejection of any claim to absolute truth: truth-like meaning generally, is created by the linguistic system. There is a rejection of truth as defining the way things are or that truth corresponds with reality as shown by objective methods of inquiry.

Postmodernism denies language is referential to (makes reference to) anything extralinguistic, that is, referential to anything in the world 'out there' as language just displays infinite plays of signifier (that which signifies) and signified (that which is signified) as expressed in language. Language is not a transparent glass through which to see reality: language simply invites us to choose from the constructions that are possible. Objectivity is an illusion; part of the mask for a rhetoric that seeks to dominate on questions of truth.

It was Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913) who helped this development when he sought to alter our perspective on the relationships between language and knowledge. His semiology (often equated with Charles Peirce's semiotics though they were very different formulations) was to be a science concerned with the study of the 'life of signs within society', to be part of social psychology. He denied language was a mirror of reality (a common view at that time) or words were ever neutral in meaning: there is no such

thing, for example, as a product name that does not have sense-meaning even if it has no reference-meaning. Language is an ever shifting system of signs, with each sign deriving its meaning from its relationship with other signs that are context-dependent for meaning. However, Saussure saw the relationship between signifier and signified as generally stable but postmodernists came to deny that this is so.

Postmodernists deduced from Saussure's semiology that meaning and truth were simply the achievements of the linguistic system. We are left with only signifiers and the signified, expressed in language, not any referents in the world 'out there'. In a purely linguistic world, there is no absolute truth and no final authority as to what is right. Postmodernism claims to be a new way of 'knowing' in a socially constructed world of signs that have no inherent meaning or order. In such a world, it becomes hard to know how one can talk of taking action and making changes even if many of us think that this is what life is about.

While our access to reality is mediated by linguistic concepts through which we make sense of experience, Kitcher (2001) points out that experience can on occasion violate our prior expectations and such violations can give rise to re-conceptualizations. He quotes the Renaissance astronomers who found new stars in the supposedly immutable heavens. He reminds us that it is not the world that is shaped by our concepts but only our mental representations of that world. These representations can be expressed in word statements (propositions) but they can also be expressed in images. Although all such representations are selective and on occasions distorted, our successful reliance on them suggests they capture something of the truth.

Postmodernism is a philosophical orientation: an orientation towards relativism combined with a certain antagonism to authority claims and the 'pretensions' of science. Postmodernism eschews mechanistic and deterministic (causal) explanations and attacks all forms of totalizing explanations (overarching theories of buyer behavior would be condemned) and rejects reductionist goals that seek to reduce psychology to neuroscience and finally to physics. Although postmodernists talk about the "exhaustion of modernity", most research in the top marketing journals falls clearly into modernity, or the neo-logical positivism of logical empiricism. What mainstream postmodernists are saying is that this whole approach is based on fundamentally flawed assumptions. For a movement that denies all talk of truth, postmodernists *implicitly* take for granted that they have the truth on their side. (We are reminded here of the 'liar paradox' in philosophy: 'this statement of mine is false' seems to be false if true, and true if false.)

Extreme postmodernists like Baudrillard (1988) regard postmodernism as discontinuous from modernity.[11] Moderate postmodernists (as most are in the United States) such as Rorty (1991) reject the notion of there being any fundamental break with modernity and typically regard postmodernism as an intensification of modernity, ridding it of its pretensions while revealing its hidden presuppositions.[12] This is also the position advocated in the

United States by Best and Kellner (1997) who, while sympathetic to many aspects of postmodernism, are concerned to uphold the concepts of truth, objectivity, and empirical inquiry.[13]

Best and Kellner claim that the defining features of postmodernism emerged in the 19th century. Thus Nietzsche (1844–1900) stressed there were no "external facts", but only biased interpretations with any claims to objectivity being simply a mask for "a will to" power. This links to the view within postmodernism that facts are not true in themselves but the product of social negotiation. Nietzsche claimed reality is too complex to be encompassed by a single perspective: a multi-perspective is de rigor. Devaney (1997) (like Breisach) demonstrates the very early origins of postmodernist claims: moral relativism, reality as something constructed, the mediated nature of knowledge; all go back to Plato.[14]

Advertising is of particular interest to postmodernists since ads are regarded as masterpieces of condensed nuance, parodies of the mightier melodramas of cinema and soap opera. Postmodernists can be fascinated with the totems of consumerism and the manufacturing that caters to it—its dynamism, its abundant creativity, and its constant productivity with an ability to mine all cultures, media, history, and persuasive symbols. For postmodernism, marketing is interpreted as everything in the service of consumption.

Postmodernism, modernity, and postmodernity

Postmodernism contrasts with modernity. Modernity is characterized by the spirit of the Enlightenment in 18th century France, Germany, England, and Scotland (Porter, 2000).[15] It is identified with a belief in rationality; belief in progress through Reason; a conviction that nature is subject to a single set of laws that are, in principle, discoverable by man; that the laws governing inanimate nature apply also to animals and sentient human beings with these human beings being regarded as capable of continuous improvement in terms of the universal goals of happiness, knowledge, justice, and liberty (Berlin, 1993).[16] It was the Enlightenment that inspired the outlook of the Founding Fathers of the United States and led to science being seen as built on a solid basis of observable facts in contrast to faith or tradition. It might be claimed, as Anatol Lieven does, that the current fundamentalist evangelical movement in the United States is pre-enlightenment in origin and anti-Enlightenment in its outlook.[17] Postmodernism attacks the Enlightenment as self-deluded and biased and responsible for much of the worst in Western civilization.

Modernity is rooted in the concept of constant human progress and the power of reason to produce freedom from superstition, and oppression. The idea of constant progress is an old one. Thus Kant had faith in human progress and it is common for people to read progress in Darwin's evolution theory. But the notion of the survival of the fittest, arising from chance variations within the species, posits no necessary progress beyond being relatively

more suited for a particular ecological niche or condition of life. It was Herbert Spencer, a friend of Darwin, who used the phrase "survival of the fittest" to claim humans and human society are progressing.

Postmodernity or the postmodern condition refers to those social (including the ideological) changes that are alleged to be replacing modernity (Lyon, 1994). Postmodernism claims to apply to cultures we associate with postmodernity. While postmodernism, as an intellectual movement, is less influential than it was, speculations about what constitutes the postmodern condition (postmodernity) are as vigorous as ever. The terms postmodernity and postmodernism are commonly used together. This is because, while arising from different disciplines, they overlap (Berkhoffer, 1995).[18] Postmodernism makes similar claims to postmodernity about Western culture with postmodernism claiming to give explanatory depth to the descriptive claims of postmodernity.[19]

While modernity is rooted in the idea of progress, postmodernism argues there is nowhere in fact to go. While Kant's (1724–1804) motto for the Enlightenment was "Dare to know," postmodernism replaces this with the slogan "Dare to believe that there is nothing to know." Postmodernism attacks the Enlightenment vision of deterministic laws to deny the dominance of reason in forming beliefs, as opposed to the influence of rhetoric and emotion on beliefs. John Milton (1608–1674) once said "reason is but choosing": postmodernism also says that substantive reasons, cognitive decision processes, and the deliberation of the pros and cons of, say, buying have little influence on purchase. Nietzsche (1844–1900) is the historical hero of the movement because he is credited with exposing the hollowness of Enlightenment hopes, showing systems of reason to be just systems of persuasion. The Nietzsche slogan, *The Death of God*, was meant to say we can never be sure of anything.

Las Vegas is an exemplar of postmodernism 'where fantasy eclipses reality' and where 'they sell perception, not reality'.[20]

> This is a postmodern paradise where fantasy and reality, illusion and the perception of it merge with hard cold cash and dance along a narrow strip of Nevada desert .... It's as if Las Vegas has finally fulfilled its destiny. After all, postmodernism was born here. Learning from Las Vegas by Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown and Steven Izenour (MIT Press)* was the design bible of the movement that elbowed aside the modernists.
> (*This book by Venturi, Brown and Izenour (1972) is a seminal work on the postmodern turn in architecture.)[21]

'Postmodernism' covers a range of viewpoints and it is difficult to identify an agreed *distinctive* cognitive content. In spite of this, it is claimed that the ideas associated with postmodernism are basic to charting cultural change and to understanding today's society for marketers as well as others.

But as Rosenau (1992) shows postmodernist thought is far from being monolithic.[22] The French version of postmodernism is the extreme version while postmodernism, as promoted in the United States, is more moderate. Rosenau labels the American postmodernists, *affirmative* postmodernists. The affirmatives are less dogmatic and, while skeptical about rationality, do not discredit it altogether. We would suggest that most marketing postmodernists are in the affirmative camp or simply antipositivist in outlook. On the other hand, French postmodernists set out to undermine any faith in rationality. This is typified by Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose* which is a postmodern novel illustrating the futility of analytic reasoning or the search for causes in explaining behavior or anything else. Another distinction is that made by Ebert (1996) between *ludic* postmodernism, more a form of light-hearted play for its own sake, and the *postmodernism of resistance* which engages in politics to make changes in society.[23] The ironic playfulness of the ludic form of postmodernism is illustrated by the Arnold Schwarzenegger movies, whose concentration on spectacle and excess reaches a point of amused self-parody.

Structuralism and poststructuralism

Postmodernism has foundations in the *structuralist* and the *poststructuralist* movements in Europe. Structuralism, based on the work of Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913), the founder of modern linguistics, studies human activity as a system, that is, as a set of interdependent parts that together form a unitary whole. Saussure distinguished the study of language as *parole* (speech as produced by the speaking individual) and language as *langue* (language as a system). Structuralism studies the structure of relations between the elements that constitute a system and studies signs of the underlying reality (Surrock, 1993).[24]

Breisach (2003) distinguishes the earlier structural postmodernists from today's poststructural postmodernists. If postmodernist is used without qualification, it refers to poststructural postmodernism.[25] Postmodernism began to flourish after structuralism's decline. While structural postmodernists visualized a static postmodernity, poststructuralist postmodernists do not. Poststructuralism claims that beyond signs like words and images, there is no capturing of the reality 'out there' but simply more signs with no underlying certainties. As Breisach (2003) says with respect to poststructuralist postmodernism, its stipulation of non-referentiality to any extralinguistic reality (that is, no reference to anything beyond the words themselves) mandates the abandonment of causality, firm knowledge, and the concept of authoritative truth.

The themes of poststructuralism melted into postmodernism: hence the term poststructural postmodernism. Poststructuralism, like postmodernism, argues that because all concepts and claims to truth are constructed in language, there can be no apprehension of reality except through the medium of language. Hence everything can be viewed as a *text* put forward for reading

(interpretation). This implies any text can only be understood in terms of other texts and not in relation to some objective reality. Language is the limit of our world as language intervenes in all thinking about the world and there is no going beyond it. Although it is not denied that there is a world 'out there', there is no going outside the text to understand that world. Postmodernists, in line with poststructuralism, refer to different scientific ideas as merely different ways of talking or thinking about phenomena and argue that simply manipulating words in the mind (thinking) does not ensure reliable inferences about reality.

Postmodernism in general shares with poststructuralism a number of claims about the postmodern condition (postmodernity). Although *all* postmodernists do not subscribe to all the claims made about the characteristics of postmodernity or the postmodern condition, most postmodernists in their writings endorse them.

Characteristics of postmodernity or the postmodern condition

Although the following characteristics of the postmodern condition have intuitive appeal, they are essentially descriptive *hypotheses* in that, providing we get agreement on the operational definitions of the terms used, we are in a position to test whether they are true or false. Failing this we fall back on common observation and whatever social science findings we possess to determine their validity. Postmodernists refuse to talk of testing hypotheses (even purely descriptive ones) since testing involves collecting evidence from the world 'out there' which is commonly regarded as meaningless: nothing 'out there' can be made extralinguistic in a purely semiotic world (Rosenau, 1992).[26] Thus there is a denial of the statement that science makes advances by checking against the facts so as to correct earlier errors, as there are no objective facts beyond what is agreed by social negotiation.

Decline of social classes

Karl Marx divided society into just two groups: Us and Them: the Proletariat and the Bourgeoisie. Today marketers and sociologists have a number of class categories depending on their purposes, but income is always considered. However, with increases in discretionary income, consumerism develops, and with the same advertising images reaching all consumers, class distinctions and ideological distinctions seem less visible. As the importance of social classes declines, it is claimed that other social differentiation, like gender, ethnicity, and age, become of greater concern to consumers. But has class really become less important to marketers?

In the United States, since the American Revolution, class divisions have often been denied. The denial originated by contrasting America with England where, at the time of the American Revolution, social class in

England was almost determined at birth. But social class is a guide to values and, since values in a final analysis determine tradeoffs in buying, social class is crucial in marketing as it still points to what is likely to appeal. Even in politics the political identities of voters seem to be more tied to values than to economic interests.[27] What Melvin Kohn says about social class or hierarchical position in the social structure is still applicable:[28]

> *hierarchical position is related to almost everything about men's lives—their political party preferences, their sexual behavior, their church membership, even their rates of ill health and death. Moreover, the correlations are not trivial; class is substantially related to all these phenomena.*

If social class is in fact disappearing, this is of fundamental importance for segmentation and advertising. But in the absence of empirical research providing a more definitive answer, would we expect social class to be much less important today? It is assumed that, with mass media, more income, more global brands, there is more homogeneity of tastes and thus fewer outward signs of social class. In the 1970s, the young seemed to detach themselves from their class roots and become a new class as far as entertainment was concerned. The middle class, once distinct, not only in income but taste in clothes, social behavior, housing, choice of reading and, in the UK at least, by speech, were invaded by masses of people who had the incomes of the middle class but adhered to lower class values. Whereas the class structure was once a pyramid in Western societies, it is now more like a diamond with the middle class becoming the majority segment. But social class persists. As Mount (2004) makes clear, the pretense of classlessness is combined with its staying power in social life.[29] Higher social classes possess higher social status and social status is highly desirable, reflecting one's position in the social pecking order. What has been changing is the ranking within the middle classes in that the traditional professions have become less important than income in establishing status. In fact, it is more true to say that money and celebrity are two things Western culture has come to value most highly. This is probably a reflection of the decline in the social-worth of 'respectability' vis-à-vis money-worth.

Inequality in income is growing in both the US and the UK, with a sustained rise in economic inequality throughout the 1980s and 1990s. No Western democracy is less equal than the United States, though the UK is not far behind. This spells lots of differences in social behavior as large income differences mandate differences in spending patterns and these, in turn, lead to class perceptions. The child of the deprived in both the US and the UK looks to the upper classes as people from another planet. Social stratification remains as people seek status, visibility, and to rise above the masses (Douglas, 1996).[30] If it is claimed that gender, ethnicity, and age are assuming greater importance than class, the answer can only be found by research or theory showing why these things are inevitably of more concern today.

It seems to us that ethnicity was more important in times gone by as racism was virulent everywhere. We should not be misled by the universal popularity of pop stars and sports celebrities among all classes of the young into believing that class is disappearing and no longer useful for segmentation purposes.

Move away from big government

At the political level, it is claimed there is a move away from big government and public ownership towards self-reliance and privatization, competitiveness, and a reduction in the welfare state. This may be so but the picture is not everywhere the same if we take into account Europe and the centralizing tendencies of the EU. There is indeed universal hostility in the United States and Europe to central government's intrusion in people's lives, largely because of a lack of faith in Government bureaucracies and the effectiveness and efficiency of government social policies. Vito Tanzi and Ludger Schuknecht (2000) show that growth in the share of public spending over the last 40 years has not brought about improvements in public welfare as measured by a very wide range of indicators.[31] However, the trouble with predicting any move away from big government is the 'see-saw' effect in politics in that the floating vote tends to swing away from endorsing the policies of those currently in power as their tradeoffs change with a sensed need for what is being displaced.

Growing importance of the culture industries and the aestheticization of everyday life

It is claimed that the culture industries are of growing importance as is the 'aestheticization' of everyday life. Consumers, it is argued, seek to turn their everyday lives into an aesthetic enterprise when trying to achieve a coherent style in what they wear and buy for the home.

Aesthetic judgments are based on feelings of pleasure and perceptions of beauty and may account for the unity in aesthetic experience. If the standard of living is rising and leisure time increasing, it seems reasonable to assume that cultural pursuits, aesthetics, and purchases co-ordinated in taste are likely to receive more attention. But this is something different from any claim to the aestheticization of everyday life. It may be that affluent consumers are giving much more weight to aesthetic appeal rather than functional performance but a question arises as to whether aesthetic tastes are becoming more refined. Whether we look at furnishings or clothes, what is most striking is the sheer ugliness that defines much of today's informality in style though postmodernists would stress 'beauty is in the eye of the beholder'.

The construction of identity through personal choice

The construction of self-identity through personal choice rather than through social pressure or social ascription is consistent with the postmodernist claim

that *fragmentation* characterizes the postmodern age rather than uniformity. The fragmentation is not simply individualism being reflected in buying but fragmentation of personal identity at each stage in life and in different social settings.

The possessions of the wealthy 'old money' groups have always reflected the idiosyncratic tastes of the individual rather than social pressure to conform while changes in all manner of possessions and pursuits do occur at different stages in life and social settings (e.g. dressing for dinner). Will the individuality of the wealthy be followed by others with the rise in discretionary income? There are strict limits to pure unfettered personal choice. Also though many consumers fail to conform to society's norms, their behavior is nonetheless *conformative* to subgroup norms as adherence to the social norms of one's social milieu makes for bonding, a sense of sharing, and acceptance.

Much work on postmodernist consumption focuses on the idea of consumer resistance through creative reinterpretation of marketing phenomena, or active subjugation of them. Hence the stress on individualism: according to Arnould and Thompson (2005), citing various other authorities, people "express personal sovereignty and claims to personal authenticity through nonconformist acts of consumption and thereby place the marketplace and its symbols at the center of their identities", and this is because a globalized, post-industrial western order has "significantly eroded the traditional bases of sociality and encouraged instead a dominant ethos of radical individualism oriented around a ceaseless quest for personal distinctiveness and autonomy in lifestyle choices."[32] We have no quibble with this as a statement of either cause or effect; it is a stratum of modern consumption, though postmodernists tend to present it as the core essence. Nevertheless in surfacing the matter of individualism as cogently as they have, they enrich discourse in the area.

The postmodernist literature on consumption makes claims as to creative group re-workings of consumer materials: "emancipation can be found in communal, performative, self-expressive 'alternative life mode communities' or 'theories of consumption' which maintain 'an autonomy from the mainstream market culture" (Kozinets, 2002).[33] This is a self-consciously 'alternative' view—that is, consumption as performance, wherein the consumer is self-empowered as a kind of creative artist of consumption. While the jaded rationalist might accept the existence of such phenomenon—as with Kozinets' choice of the Burning Man event—they would also appear to inhabit the category of minority idiosyncrasy, irrelevant to the bulk of contemporary consumption practice.

Some marketers, postmodernists claim, regard consumers as a bundle of fixed needs against which the consumer compares what is on offer. If marketers are doing this, it is manifestly wrong. If the idea of consumers being a bundle of fixed wants were accepted, it would reduce marketing to merely identifying known wants and developing products to match.

If postmodernism reminds us that the consumer is not fixed in his or her wants but 'fickle', with wants in constant flux that defy being pinned down, this is all for the good.

A world of flux and fragmentation, without absolute values

This is an extension of the idea, popularized in the 1960s, of wanting to do 'one's own thing'. But, as Unger (1984) says, social life is a constant struggle between the desire to adhere to the social norms of one's social milieu versus avoiding being coerced or subjugated by social pressure.[34] This suggests a limit to fragmentation since the purchases of those within a social group will tend to have a family resemblance. To belong to a subcultural group suggests a sharing of values. On the other hand, to talk about the absence of absolute values is a straw man. There are no sustainable absolute values when buying because values are tied to tradeoffs in decision-making and tradeoffs vary with circumstances. The consumer may have *conclusive* reasons for choosing a particular brand but never *absolute* reasons as there are always circumstances that change tradeoffs.

For some postmodernist marketers, the consumer is no passive target of monopoly capitalism, but nothing less than a creative artist, and a socially engaged one at that: "in contrast to classic sociological accounts of subculture, in-group social status in these settings is achieved not through adherence to monolithic consumption norms but through displays of localized cultural capital (particular forms of knowledge and skills valued in the group) and skill in combining, reworking and innovating the pool of symbolic resources that are shared by group members" (Arnould and Thompson 2005).[35] . . . This is a self-evident truth about modern consumption, but its advocates in seeking to elevate and dignify it (and empower thereby the little consumer against the big corporation) are making it a more visible phenomenon than it actually is. There may indeed be pockets of creative consumption, but the phrase 'ephemeral collective identifications' is nearer the mark; wearing a French Connection UK t-shirt is no more than that, and is unworthy of some higher dignity. Few areas of consumption involve the depth of emotional commitment such as the authors implicitly invoke; it is possible for them to produce examples, but the counter-examples are legion. The consumer as romantic rebel is a beguiling thought, but is also wishful thinking: "this research has also shown that marketplace cultures often define their symbolic boundaries through an ongoing opposition to dominant (i.e. middle class) lifestyle norms and mainstream consumer sensibilities" (Thompson and Troester 2002).[36] They do occasionally perhaps, but not often.

Another, more sustainable, claim is for the neo-tribalism of postmodern consumption practice, a claim with intuitive plausibility (otherwise how would we explain the pervasive cultism of brands?): 'postmodern consumer culture is fragmented across a diversity of consumption-oriented microcultures,

or tribes, each exhibiting distinct patterns of socially shared meanings and practices' (Thomson and Troester, 2002). Authorities (Arnould and Thompson, 2005) speak of "the emergence of consumer microcultures in areas such as health foods," arguing that "consumer culture theory research has shown that the tribal aspects of consumption are quite pervasive." This is a response to the "potential alienating and isolating conditions" of the new global market order where "consumers forge more ephemeral collective identifications and participate in rituals of solidarity that are grounded in common lifestyle interests and leisure avocations." They focus in particular on a minor branch of consumption, that is experiential consumption, in order to realize the complete embodiment of their theory. They say that such consumption activities foster collective identifications grounded in shared beliefs, meanings, mythologies, rituals, social practices, and status systems. But in so doing they are perhaps describing the ideal more than they are the real.

The model of the consumer and of the marketplace differs widely among postmodern theorists. Some see the market as an oppressive juggernaut from which consumers seek escape: inevitable perhaps, such a market is seen as a masculine construct.

There are many divergent perspectives on consumer autonomy. For Kozinets (2002) market influences "constrain consumers creative roles and identities, limit their human freedom by enforcing particular views of reality, and make their everyday life less diverse and more passive." Such theorists seek an ideology of consumer liberation "that would involve placing consumers outside the totalizing logic of the market." Such theorists see themselves as priests of revolution, secular variants perhaps of liberation theology, where the target is not the oppressive state but the oppressive market. Enlightenment lies in the recognition of the consumer as expressive, in irrationalising the market, a project of internal sabotage: "by positioning production and consumption as expressive rather than productive, the rational efficiency motive that drives marketplace production is discursively enabled, and opportunities for re-enchantment emerge" (Kozinets, 2002).

Such a view diverges from Arnould and Thompson, who see the consumer not as victim of the market but as savvy, autonomous. From this perspective, "the marketplace provides consumers with an expressive and heterogeneous palette of resources from which to construct individual and collective identities." Consumers are not passive objects but co-creators of meaning, and the market, the stage on which they act, is a magical place, "a pre-eminent source of mythic and symbolic resources through which people, including those who lack resources to participate in the market as full-fledged consumers, construct narratives of identity." Consumption is an identity-driven activity, consumers are "interpretive agents whose meaning-creating activities range from those that tacitly embrace the dominant representations of consumer identity and lifestyle ideals portrayed in advertising and mass media to those that consciously deviate from these ideological instructions." This is surely a much more credible perspective on the relation of consumers to markets.

It accepts the heterogeneity of consumerdom, a continuum moving from uncritical acceptance to willful deviation.

Consumers use marketing. Marketing probably does not abuse consumers unless they will it to. They may of course become partners in their own self-deceit, becoming "complicit in their own seduction by marketplace narratives." Such a perspective places consumer autonomy at its center and stresses both their freedom of decision and the creative use they make of that freedom: "consumers critically reinterpret media" and they "bend advertisements to fit their own life circumstances." Thus for Arnould and Thompson at least "consumers are conceptualized as interpretive agents rather than as passive dupes. Thus, various forms of consumer resistance inevitably greet the dominant normative ideological influence of commercial media and marketing."

No absolute truth, faith in scientific rationality or the inevitability of progress

The dismissal of any belief in absolute truth, faith in scientific rationality or the inevitability of progress are central tenets of postmodernism. Truth is rejected as a legitimate goal while scientific theory is regarded as an 'authoritarian weapon'. Given their view of a constructed reality, it is sometimes denied that there is any difference between history and fiction (Barthes, 1970).[37] But no historian accepts that history is purely literature under another name unless the reference is to stylistic matters. Would postmodernists see the history of World War II as having no more truth-content than the literature of that period with the horrors of Hitler and the Holocaust just fiction? From their pronouncements they would have difficulty saying otherwise and still being consistent. Journalists also deny theirs is just an exercise in fiction. Recent scandals of journalists making up their stories prompted the outrage by editors and the public at large (e.g. at the *New York Times* of all places). Even if we accept a journalist may put his own spin on events, we insist on a basis in verifiable facts.

But for the postmodernist Barthes, historical discourses do not mirror reality; they only signify it. While a historical text may assert the very moment when something was said to happen, it only means somebody has made that assertion. As a postmodernist, Barthes argues historians reduce the triad: signifier (word) → signified (concept) → referent into the dyad: signifier → referent when the correct dyad is simply: signifier → signified. The referent is but a referential illusion. Facts have a linguistic existence only. Historians or anyone else do not find truths about the past. This postmodernist claim is hardly something that would stand up in a court of law where facts about the past are basic to a verdict! If we took Barthes seriously in marketing there would be few 'historical reviews' and 'situation analyses' carried out as a prerequisite to developing a marketing strategy. On the other hand, the potential bias in the selection of historical facts and the selection of words can come close to creating fiction.

The importance of emotion, spectacle, and fantasy; the erasing of the distinction between reality and unreality and the role of the unconscious in influencing behavior and the corresponding irrationality of consumers

Emotion, with its link to values, shapes tradeoffs in buying (de Sousa, 1990).[38] The information processing approach of cognitive psychology rooted in the metaphor of the computer neglects emotion but marketing practitioners cannot afford to do so. Postmodernists like Debord (1990) argue that consumption by consumers revolves around the production of spectacles and images as these project a promise of the good life and the fantasy of happiness and wealth.[39] He stresses the "aesthetics" of a product as being a more decisive element in buying than value-in-use. For him the spectacle is tied to entertainment where consumers consume "commodity spectacles" without much involvement. The world of the spectacle is the "real" world to consumers as it offers novelty and excitement. With symbols and images constituting the consumer's world, the distinction is lost for consumers between appearances and "reality."

Baudrillard (1994) argues that the use-value and exchange-value of products has given way to "sign-value" where products become primarily symbols to be consumed and exhibited.[40] Thus, for example, the consumer, through designer labels, consumes the symbols of power, status, and prestige. But Baudrillard, unlike Debord, sees consumer society not as a constellation of spectacles but of sign-values that constitute a hierarchy of prestige. He claims that the distinction between reality and unreality is thus eradicated. The distinction between the real and the imaginary is erased as the consumerist society, and the technology that goes with it, creates its own reality for marketing purposes. Rejecting any stable relationship between the signifier (e.g. product) and the signified (symbols of prestige), the consumer world is one of flux or constant change. Signs make no referents to an extralinguistic reality. There are only *simulacra* which refer to nothing but themselves; as signs (e.g. in ads) they lose contact with anything beyond themselves. As a consequence, the 20th century is witnessing the destruction of the cultural meanings of signs on a massive scale.

Ads that evoke fantasy images of pleasurable satisfactions arouse desires. In this state of fantasizing, consumers are in a state of *hyperreality* where the distinction between objects and their representations is dissolved, being left only with a simulacrum (pl. simulacra) which is a copy of a copy for which there is no original and no distinction between the real and the representation. Poster (1988)[41] claims that ads tend to mirror the fantasies of social groups so the academic analysis of consumption needs to shift from the analysis of technical/economic factors to the linguistic categories of sign and signifiers. There is in fact a need to study both. As TV controls the context of all its message even heroes can be created of villains.

The world of the consumer is thus viewed by postmodernists as composed purely of signs with the distinction between reality and the consumer's world of signs becoming lost. We move from the belief that the meaning of language is transparent to the recognition that language throws up ambiguous images (a move described as moving from '*logocentrism* to *iconocentrism*'). Logocentricism, in contrast to iconocentrism, seeks to fix meanings to give order to the world. Such a logocentric stance characteristic of modernity is dismissed with the recognition of the indeterminacy of language meaning. The new electronic media introduces a world of pure simulacra that erode the distinction between the 'real' world and images. The postmodern world consists of only signifiers without referents in extralinguistic reality. The era of television in politics, for example, has eroded the distinction between symbol and reality 'out there' and promoted style and symbol over substance. Lyotard (1984) even argues that knowledge legitimated by computers passes as the 'real'.[42] The problems posed by electronically mediated communication with its power to exercise control, like the surveillance capacities of information technology, are of concern to postmodernists.

The idea that the consumer attends to anything beyond some melange of styles and images may be denied but postmodernists in marketing defend that position. Thus signifiers in, say, TV advertisements are regarded as floating freely with little or no connection with the products advertised. Symbols become detached from their cultural moorings; the crucifix, for example, becoming merely another form of bodily adornment along with tattoos and earrings. Brand images, designs, and styles are simply ways of conferring *symbolic* meaning rather than anything of substance in the products themselves. Whatever coherence in meaning occurs, it is attained through symbol manipulations, not by reference to anything in the world outside. Baudrillard (1988) claims we are in a situation of *hyperreality* where the distinctions between objects and their representations, the real and the unreal, are dissolved.[43] The world of the consumer is composed of pure *simulacra* or the hyperreal where only the signs themselves constitute the realm of consumer experience. In a situation of strong hyperreality, the consumer is unable to separate reality from illusion. On the other hand, in a situation of weak hyperreality, the consumer separates the two but prefers to remain with the illusion.

Postmodernists stress the dominance of the simulacra. Distinctions between the real and the synthetic dissolve and everything becomes a parody of everything else. Like so much in their discourses, they have succeeded in surfacing from a morass of marketplace properties a critical insight into the contemporary material condition. Simulacra and the aesthetics of pastiche do indeed play a role in all sorts of consumption, from clothes to housing. But, on occasion, the postmodernists appear to forget the boundary between scholarship and advocacy. They manage to portray a world in which everything is simulacra, a reduction ad absurdam. They speak of the illusory separation between the real and the not-real: everything simulacra of one sort or another.

So all debate, then, ends here, in the claim that Disneyland is no more a fantasy than the suburb in which the mass of us live. Does this make sense? Any two objects can be shown to have similarities but the question is whether they are relevant similarities. 'Beliefs' track how the world is as a matter of survival while 'wants' tell us how we would like the world to be. Fantasies are not beliefs in this sense but stand for beliefs in our imaginings. Similarly, 'wishes' differ from wants in that wishes are not bound by considerations of feasibility. Disneyland plays to our fantasies and wishes while the suburb brings us face-to-face with cold reality. Certainly fantasies can be embedded in suburbia—for example the architectural style known in England as 'stock-broker's Tudor'. But there is degree in everything, surely: to notice points of comparison does not make any two phenomena the same, or even relevantly similar, they may still relate to completely different categories of perception and typology. Las Vegas could indeed become a metaphor for all consumption. Firat and Venkatesh (1995) refer to: "a realm in which everything is removed from real experience and becomes an inverted representation of itself." But this begs the question of what really is real; to such critics we inhabit a realm of simulacra. The value or significance of saying this however is not made clear beyond suggesting they have discovered some unitary essence.

Related to this is the proposition that the 'consumption' of images has moved us more into a society of spectacle. This is important but not new. Dorothy Davies in *A History of Shopping* describes how even in the 18th century, laws had to be passed in London to limit the size of commercial icons and symbols, so magnificently a grand spectacle had they become. 'Everything is theatre' is one of those universal generalizations that invite us to a viewpoint rather than to the reality about us. This is generally true of postmodernism. But when applied generally the notion of life as theater-writ-large has a narrow referential-meaning. Similarly, 'Only the spectacle is real' may be a contemporary observation but it is not an original one, from Shakespeare's "the world's a stage" to Goffman's dramaturgical model. It is descriptive of the human condition, unrelated to postmodernism.

To return to the role of fantasy. We have no difficulty in seeing the role of fantasy in the life of the consumer. Women's magazines (and many men's) are all about fantasy and escapism. However, it is doubtful that readers are unable to separate the reality from the fantasy or that they read these magazines for their correspondence to the reality. If people could not distinguish between, say, the sci-fiction fantasies in films and reality, they would quickly find that life outside the cinema was impossible. And advertisers are not as influential as critics think even among school children. Studies discussed by *The Economist* (January 6th, 2001 page 65) found that children as young as six years of age understood the purpose of commercials and distinguish them from entertainment while fantasy was distinguished from reality.

Many would agree that modern media help form as well as capture something of reality but this does not result in a situation in which sign or image is everything. That said, there is much in the idea of consumers

being carried along by fantasies and refusing to face up to the reality 'out there'. Overly rational models of consumer behavior fail to recognize that this is so. There is in fact an element of simulacra in some early (rational) models of buyer behavior based on hypothetical constructs that had no objective, empirical grounding but won acceptance by proposing something that sounded logical as to what might be happening in the mind. Before long a whole superstructure of inferences were erected on a 'boxology' of constructs and treated as if there was an empirical counterpart just waiting to be operationalized. We put the hierarchy of effects models into this category since they all confuse a logical mental sequence with an actual mental one.

In any case, is this ability to fantasize universal? Campbell (1987) regards the ability (as opposed to the capacity) to daydream or fantasize as analogous to the ability to read, that is, as something that requires a particular type of exposure and learning.[44] Csikszentmihalyi (1990)[45] agrees and quotes Jerome Singer (1973)[46] that daydreaming is a skill that some children never learn to use. Csikszentmihalyi regards daydreams as helping to bring emotional order to the mind, allowing both children and adults to rehearse imaginary situations so that the best strategy for confronting a situation can be adopted. He does not, however, view daydreams as constituting a person's whole reality. The claims in fact about people being unable to distinguish fantasy from reality amounts to saying consumers in a postmodern society behave like psychotics. An example generally quoted is of an actor in a soap opera, playing the role of villain, being attacked by some viewer. But this is a rare event and may simply be a gesture of protest against the values symbolized by the role the actor plays.

The idea that consumers cannot rise above the images seems far-fetched. The metaphor of consuming spectacles and symbols implies the consumer is indifferent to substance or cannot get beyond symbolization. But student activists are currently claiming that many international brands symbolize for them the exploitation of child labor; environmental pollution and deception, not satisfactions of desire. This revolt (as against Nike at the University of Oregon) has been termed 'brand boomerang' and is of corporate concern. No belief in advertising fantasy here. With regard to simulacra that refer to nothing but themselves, this suggests a complete absence of any other associations attached to the brand. There is an echo here of companies who fallaciously believe they can choose computer-generated 'meaningless' brand names. They cannot. Every word and every brand name evokes associations, that is, will have some sense-meaning. Tarytak and lamolay may name no entity in the real world but both will still have associations. Which would you choose as the name of a toilet paper? On there other hand, there is something in the notion of some consumers never getting beyond what a brand symbolizes for them and acting in accordance with that symbolism. But this would not include all consumers or all consumer products but more likely those that tie with self-image and self-esteem.

Postmodern critics have a nuanced understanding of the role of symbolism in persuasion and in the construction of identity via material possessions. They recognize for example the persuasive significance of anthropomorphism in auto design, and their perspicuity is well supported in psychology. That our universe, material and imaginary, is constructed round the building blocks of symbols; this is the kernel of their understanding: "one can consume objects, symbols and images, increasingly recognized to be one and the same" (Firat and Venkatesh, 1995).[47] But are they really saying that everything is exclusively symbolic, like mathematics or language, or can be interpreted symbolically, denying validity to any non-symbolic elements? This is an example of how postmodern critics have given us a richer concept of what consumption is. But their great achievement in this is often nullified by a tendency to mystify, exaggerate, and distort. Firat and Venkatesh believe that "no object has a value independent of the symbolic." This is a universal statement but universals are generally denied by postmodernists. What is the evidence for this proposition? (Exactly the kind of question such scholars do not ask, as if it were impolitic to do so). For example the Japanese auto industry triumphed not because their cars were superior symbols, but because they worked. A car is not just a symbol, important though its symbolic properties may be, and yet this is the kind of declamatory universal claim such critics regularly articulate. Of course we might say the Japanese car symbolized reliability and value for money on the ground that these are what the car stood for in people's mind. But this would equate the car as a symbol with the car's image in the mind of the consumer. This would reduce the operational utility of the concept of 'symbol'. A Rolls Royce is a sign of wealth but is a symbol of status. But words like 'symbol' in the abstract seem unproblematic in sense-meaning but, like so many terms used in social science have an inherent vagueness when we come to application.

We agree that consumers are influenced on occasions purely by image connotations; images that can give rise to the consumer acting purely on gut liking (the likeability heuristic), without further reflection. We accept that customer enjoyment depends not just on what a product is but on what it is taken to be. The symbolic meanings of, say, prestige and status that are attached to a brand influence perceptions and are just as much a real part of the brand as substantive properties. But this is not the same as saying people live purely in a world of symbols. Consumers typically know full well they are not just buying a pair of sneakers but prestige, visibility, and status. Go out and speak to a group of youngsters from the age of nine years onward and see what they believe they are buying. No use telling them that the non-branded, lower-priced sneaker is just as good in every respect. They will tell you (as they told one of the authors in protocol statements) that that is not all that they are buying.

If Baudrillard is right, brand image would be the major influence in buying, not substance. This can be so but it assumes that signifiers, like the product itself, become unanchored to anything signified in terms of

substantive properties, simply floating in their own orbit divorced from any extralinguistic reality. But the fact that consumers are so often influenced by brand image is usually because they have learned to take much else, such as quality, for granted. Brand image can signify prestige, status, and so on as well as providing social reassurance in conditions of uncertainty. We agree that brand choice is commonly not the result of conscious reflective evaluation of tangible evidence as assumed by certain buyer behavior models like the multi-attribute model, as the evidence is often ambiguous or vague. But brand choice also involves trust or at least confidence and brand image can provide that trust. There is commonly a perceptual interdependence between brand image and the assessment of substance. Yet it would be fatal for marketers to believe that it can all be done with mirrors and substance never counts. It may be that the images attached to Joe DiMaggio were mainly a media creation but the substance of being a great baseball player was essential to the legend (Cramer, 2000).[48] Appearances are not everything. Thus American farmers created the perfect apple in appearance: lipstick red; broad-shouldered; uniform in size, color; a health food that looked dazzling. But the same farmers are now falling into debt because consumers complain the fruit does not taste like the original Red Delicious (Egan, 2000).[49]

The Baudrillard world of the consumer ignores a wide range of goods and services where distinctive *technical* benefits provide the competitive edge. While the symbols of status, visibility, and prestige are important for the consumer in deciding what to buy, not all goods and services fall into this category. Few brands with crucial use-functions to perform are likely to remain supreme without being competitive in the utilitarian aspects of the product. The imagery part of brand image is tied to *affect*-driven choices while a brand's reputational capital is tied to *belief*-driven choices. In any case, brand attributes and the symbolism attached to the brand form a gestalt and the aim of advertising is to ensure this is so.

The claim about the media determining opinion (as opposed to strongly influencing what is talked about) can be debated. In the first place, we might ask, which media (?) since all media do not advocate the same opinions. Even when the media are seemingly united in promoting one viewpoint, there is no difficulty in finding examples where this is not decisive. An example is the Danish referendum in the year 2000 on the adoption of the Euro. The media were unanimously in favor but the Danes, nonetheless, voted against entry.

Finally there is the claim that people are non-rational with an orientation towards instant gratification, with feelings always dominant. It is certainly true that behaviorism has demonstrated the strong desire for instant gratification and forbearance is not generally a virtue of the consumer. But much depends on how we define 'non-rational'. Although we accept consumers have flawed rationality (Gilovich, 1991),[50] they cannot be persuaded to believe black is white or to harm themselves without some compensating reason like cutting off an arm to save one's life. If people were generally non-rational, rational choice theory would have had little predictive success.

But there are studies indicating rational choice theory can have predictive success (Young, 1997).[51] But such success is not sufficient to undermine the view of the consumer as having flawed rationality, far removed from the high rationality view of the economist.

Consumerism dominates our lives as citizens

It is alleged that consumerism dominates the lives of citizens: consumer lifestyles and mass consumption control people's lives. For the postmodernist, social class has less relevance in Western societies than does lifestyle and consumption. Featherstone (1991) speaks of shopping in shopping centers becoming an experience of spectacle, luxury or nostalgia.[52] Thus ads are less concerned with functional utility and more concerned to associate the brand with a lifestyle and valued cultural images.

While it is true that shopping malls and spectacle make shopping a potentially very pleasant experience ('retail therapy'), and shopping can be exciting, it is also true that much shopping for, say, groceries is still a chore and this is what shopping on the Internet is trying to exploit. The claim about consumption controlling the lives of citizens is an empirical proposition that would need to be operationalized and tested. But postmodernism denies such studies would settle the issue. Nonetheless there are good reasons for rejecting this postmodernist claim. It rests on the implicit assumption that the primary concern of people revolves round possessions. This is usually supported by the additional claim that possessions provide people with their self-identity (Dittmar, 1992).[53] But self-identity is based on things that concern us which includes many variables captured by demographics such as social class, occupation, age, ethnicity, and so on (Flanagan, 1996).[54] What amazingly empty lives people would lead if the postmodernists were right. The truth is that there are just too many concerns in life to be so self-indulgent.

Relativism

Relativism denies there are objective standards of truth. Relativism, as a philosophy, is associated with postmodernism. Although not associated with modernity, modernity has not managed to avoid all relativism since it has embraced ethical relativism. In *Whose Justice? What Rationality?* Alasdair MacIntyre (1989) argues that Enlightenment rationality sanctioned the universal acceptance of moral relativism.[55] It was the logical positivists of modernity who argued that statements must be either "meaningful" or "nonsensical." While meaningful statements are either analytic (true by definition) or synthetic (able to be checked empirically), value judgments, ethical declarations or religious pronouncements are simply emotive or nonsensical, matters of assertion or preference. An ethics based on emotivism is implicitly moral relativism.

Denial of distinctions between 'high' and 'low' culture

Postmodernists have contempt for distinctions between popular culture like pop music and high culture such as opera. The postmodernist regards such distinctions as oppressive and to be rejected. They even argue that the distinctions between high culture and mass culture and between different artistic genres are disappearing on the ground that elements of style in the postmodern world are drawn from different contexts and historical periods. A simple example might be the man who wears his blue jeans under a formal black cashmere overcoat. Pastiche ('bricolage') puts together elements of style from radically different contexts and periods of history. It is currently in fashion. TV also has had the effect of mixing audiences which results in more commonality of values and tastes.

One implication that might be drawn from this is that segmentation based on traditional differences in cultural tastes will not distinguish different target groups. Some TV channels have accepted this, catering to the lowest denominator of taste. However, the fact is that consumers within different subcultures do differ, for example, those who attend the opera, in contrast to a rock concert. Even if some consumers are in both segments, each segment caters to different wants and will need different products and promotional appeals.

The rejection of the notion of constant progress

All schemes of history that suggest universal application and any sort of permanence are rejected. Historians refer to the notion of constant progress in history as the 'Whig' interpretation of history where history is viewed as a conflict between 'progress' and 'reaction', in which progress in the end is always shown to be victorious bringing in its train ever increasing enlightenment and prosperity. This is a classical illustration of how interpretations can be guided by perspectives; in this case our perspective on history. The Whig interpretation of history is underwritten by few (if any) historians today. There is the recognition that technological and scientific progress are a mixed blessing while operationalizing the concept of progress always calls forth personal values which can differ widely.

There is no inevitability of progress. One reason is that not everyone has the same values as to agree about what constitutes progress. However, to reject the notion of scientific and technological progress is unwarranted. John Horgan's (1996) *The End of Science* is often quoted as a book on science in line with the postmodernism's gloomy view.[56] Although this book is an excellent popular guide to what is happening in science, the interviews and discussions it contains cannot reasonably be viewed as supportive of the book's title, which is probably the reason why some scientists are (too) critical of the book, dismissing Horgan as a mere science journalist, not a real scientist. There are still many puzzles to solve in science. Thus the continuing conflict between

relativity theory and quantum mechanics lies unresolved; cosmology is in a state of confusion; there is still the problem of string theory refusing to go away while we are not even sure we have mastered the fundamental nature of matter as reflected in our lack of understanding of consciousness (Damasio, 2000).[57] Even in an applied science like medicine there is a profound ignorance of the biological causes of many diseases with the public being fobbed off with all embracing pseudo causes such as 'unhealthy lifestyle'. However, there is a popular belief in the inevitability of progress which marketers exploit when describing products as a technological breakthrough.

There are also, in contrast, 'cycle' histories like Toynbee's *A Study of History*. Toynbee sought to explain the growth, development, and *decay* of civilizations but his thesis never did have great support among historians. The rejection comes not just from the arbitrariness and the forcing of generalizations but from the inadequacy of explanation justifying the thesis. On the other hand, it is an odd conceptualization of progress that denies scientific progress. We find such claims to be simply incoherent as would anyone who has benefited from the scientific advances in medicine and the modern age of high-definition television, solar power, and so on.

The reduced importance of the author as the creator of the text

Postmodernists speak of the "intentional fallacy" or the "death of the author." The 'intentional fallacy' is said to occur when we believe that any kind of evidence 'external' to the text helps clarify its meaning when this simply confuses a psychological influence with the text itself. There is no point, for example, in focusing on the author's intent because texts represent a 'polysemic sign', that is, one diverse in meaning. In any case, if all readings are equally valid, there is no unambiguous author's intent. For Derrida (1992), the text is a material trace removed from whoever was its author.[58] As a consequence, it must be studied as an independent artifact. The meaning of the text is a function of the discourse (speech-type act) alone. This claim is basic to Derrida's technique of deconstruction (see later) where any initial deconstruction of a text is always open to further deconstruction with no final definitive interpretation. Derrida attacks every theory of meaning based on the notion of *logos* (reason or meanings based on the relation of words to things to which they refer. In other words, he banishes referential meaning!

Dismissing the need to discover authorial intention allows the reader (interpreter) more flexibility. However, this is not regarded as a license 'for anything goes' for the text's content is unlikely to endorse just any reading. This is an important point since it means that the postmodernist's semiotic world is not entirely arbitrary. However, if we accept that all readings, within limits tied to text, are equally valid, we could deny a judge's interpretation of the law is any better than anyone else's; that contracts are what

you interpret them to be and professors have no more right to impose their understanding of course texts than the student; all exams are contestable and all grading absurd. On the other hand, postmodernists, within broad limits, cannot themselves claim to be misinterpreted when all interpretations are equally valid.

Derrida's use of the term "texts" reminds the reader not just of what is present in the text but the 'absent other', the excluded, who are the oppressed or suppressed. A key claim of deconstruction is that every structure or text, whether literary, social, political or religious, is created and maintained through the mechanism of exclusion. Something inevitably gets left out. Exclusive structures make for repression but whatever is repressed does not just go away but always returns to undermine any construction regardless of how secure it seems. Deconstruction in locating the 'absent other' also locates the source of a potential tension and repression that can lead to change. On the other hand, pluralism, diversity, and heterogeneity stymie the forces of oppression, authority, and hegemony.

Derrida invents the word différance for setting things apart so anything distinctly recognizable is accounted for by différance. The word itself is meant to show the dependence of speech upon writing (Derrida puts writing first before the spoken word, ignoring the power of speech in persuasion), for the difference to a French speaker between difference and différance is no difference at all: a difference discernible to the eye but not to the ear.

For critics of Derrida, it is not at all clear why author and text do not form the relevant system for the purpose of interpretation. If finding out the author's intention is an irrelevancy, it follows that it is not necessary for the author to have meant to say anything at all. In marketing research, understanding a question in a questionnaire raises the question of the semantic understanding of the utterance. Questions are neither true nor false but often ambiguous until you know what the questioner is getting at: knowing intentions is basic for a respondent answering a questionnaire. (Students who complain that they do not understand an examination question should be reminded that this is commonly the case when they have not done the readings for the course or followed what the course is about to know what the examiner is getting at). The respondent requires not only an understanding of the literal meaning of the question but also inferences about the questioner's *intention* if the pragmatic meaning of the question to the respondent is to be made clear. Similarly, in interpreting buying action, marketers are concerned with the buyer's intentions and more specifically, the wants and beliefs lying behind these intentions. Action, as opposed to involuntary behavior, typically connects to an intention even if that intention is formed at the point of sale. Marketing is vitally concerned with intentional action and cannot ignore authorial intent.

For many critics, a text and its author are interdependent and interpretations are affected by beliefs about the author, just as respondents are influenced by the assumed intentions of the sponsoring author behind a questionnaire.

Even the 'realist' school of lawyers in the United States, who insist that the intentions of the framers of the Constitution have no relevance, were among the first to look for guidance as to what the framers intended by such phrases as 'other high crimes and misdemeanors' when the question of President Clinton's impeachment was being raised. As Rosen (1992) says: "To say that the text has a life of its own, independent of the intentionality of the author or the reader, is to identify life with abstract structures and, in this sense, is like treating the mathematical model of reality apart from the reality."[59] Rosen regards postmodernism as an attempt to assert Nietzsche's doctrine of 'noble nihilism' and in this sense is actually a defective version of modernity.

Derrida's way of reading (interpreting) a text has appealed to many in marketing. This is because Derrida focuses *not* on the meaning of a sign in terms of what is *signified* but on the meaning of the sign as a *signifier*. In more conventional terms, he shifts the focus from what signs refer to (referential-meaning) to symbolic-meaning. This is consistent with the view of the consumer's world being purely linguistic with no ties to any extralinguistic reality. We do not deny that this can be so but not that it is the norm. The focal point for all deconstructive readings is the style of the discourse so what meaning comes across is dependent to a large extent on the mode of expression. This is because *how* something is expressed, and not just *what* is said, is what influences target audiences. What gives meaning to a text is language-dependent.

Many in marketing will have little quarrel with this even if contrary to the assumption made in economics (where the 'framing' of an issue is assumed to have no direct effect). Nonetheless many find it difficult to separate referential-meaning from symbolic-meaning. Surely a brand name signals something real as well as symbolizing something, just as the presence of fire signals burning but also symbolizes life? The postmodernist would reply that what it signals can only be expressed in language and that does not imply reality has been captured. We agree a consumer may absorb purely the pleasant symbolism in an ad. This is fine if that symbolism can be closely associated with the brand. In the absence of a reference to the brand itself, the ad may not generate such association. This is common with emotional symbolic advertising since so much attention is taken up with the emotional symbolism that all else is ignored or forgotten.

4 Central philosophical assertions of postmodernism

The assertions about the postmodern condition (postmodernity) covered in the previous chapter are generally endorsed by postmodernism. They are empirical questions though postmodernists do not undertake empirical investigations, simply considering alternative discourses and meanings. However, what distinguishes postmodernism from postmodernity lies not in describing the post-modern condition, but that postmodernism, unlike post-modernity, sets out a number of philosophical positions. Postmodernists show approval of plurality, indeterminacy, and instability, regarding them as inherently positive while highly negative towards consensus as something basically oppressive. It is the philosophical assertions that are not empirical that are the most controversial and these are discussed below.

There is no such thing as truth; what is said to be the truth simply reflects consensus

This claim that there is no such thing as truth is made on the ground that there are no objective standards of truth. Truth and knowledge go together in that, if we claimed that Mars is made of green cheese, it cannot be categorized as knowledge since it is false. Although the philosopher Karl Popper claimed that, though we can falsify a hypothesis, we can never prove it, Pierre Duhem, a physicist, in 1906, argued that scientific theories (as opposed to descriptive hypotheses) can never be conclusively established or conclusively refuted by observation.[1] In other words, falsifying a scientific hypothesis is never certain either. Duhem points out that a physicist never subjects an isolated hypothesis to experimental testing but can only test a group of hypotheses. When experimental results disagree with predictions, the physicist learns only that at least one of the hypotheses in the group is unacceptable. But the experiment does not indicate which of the hypotheses must be rejected. A test does not just test the hypothesis itself but a whole set of hypotheses. Every test of a hypothesis takes account of many hypotheses in respect of:

(a) the initial conditions governing the conduct of the experiment (including the validity of the correspondence rules or operational definitions)

(b) auxiliary assumptions to the effect that nothing else interfered:

Thus if

H = hypothesis
IC = initial conditions
AA = auxiliary assumptions
P = the predicted consequences

we argue

If (H, IC, AA) then P

or

If (not-H, and IC and AA are accepted as unproblematic)
then probably not-P.

Science is thus not capable of achieving complete certitude in either proof or falsification. Because we test hypotheses in conjunction with initial conditions and auxiliary assumptions, we are never absolutely sure we have confirmed or *refuted* the hypothesis itself. When new evidence is in conflict with current theory, scientists may simply reject one or more of the background premises. It follows that the data in support of a theory are always underdetermining, that is, the data do not uniquely determine the theory since more than one explanation can always be found. We may agree there is no certainty but this is not incompatible with possessing knowledge since knowledge to the scientist is linked to the strength of evidence for a particular proposition. Our knowledge of the world is not just linguistic but derives from observations that may only subsequently be given a label.

The postmodernists stress the lack of certainty and attack the very concept of deterministic laws. While it is true that we can never be *logically* certain that some theory is true; it does not mean there can be no *practical* certainty. We accept that there are no deterministic laws in marketing but the weight of evidence for a claim provides, on occasions, practical certainty. Logically there may be an infinite number of hypotheses to test when we set about testing any one of them but, in practice, the number of feasible rival hypotheses is likely to be no more than five (Miller, 1987).[2] Sometimes as in the case of the double helix, we may be unable to think of any rival hypotheses at all. Furthermore, just because there can be several explanations for some phenomena does not imply that each of these is equally likely. However, postmodernists argue that consensus is the method by which scientific 'facts' are determined. This may on occasions be so when the evidence is still problematic. For example, the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* is compiled this way with the unfortunate premise that patients

are assumed to have one specific disorder that is corrected by a specific treatment (Schiffer, 1998).[3]

Facts are about the consensus of opinion

Postmodernists question the very idea of 'facts'. For them, facts are simply things about which there is consensus so facts can be said to be socially negotiated. Facts and so-called truths, it is claimed, are relative to the 'interpretive communities' (e.g. the physics community, the marketing community, and so on) who accept or reject them according to their persuasiveness which, in turn, rests more on the power of rhetoric than 'material objectivity'. Each interpretive community looks at the world through its own conceptual lens, never questioning presuppositions or values. For postmodernists, a scientist is never a detached observer as all observations occur within the boundaries of some theoretical perspective or paradigm. Theoretical perspectives also implicitly promote certain values. Thus Prilleltensy (1984) does a good job of demonstrating that psychological theories are full of implicit ideological assumptions supportive of the status quo.[4] For him, the very concept of a value-neutral psychology has been utilized to advance values that benefit the dominant segments of society while being portrayed as benefiting society as a whole. There is a good deal of truth in this claim and suggests the need for ensuring plurality of perspectives so there is vigorous debate about studies and findings. But it is hard to see Prilleltensy's criticism as applying so sweepingly to the natural sciences where there is less scope for ideology. It might be noted that Max Planck (1858–1947), whose work originated quantum theory, illustrates how the evidence might be so compelling that it just has to be accepted. Planck was a champion of Newtonian physics so when the evidence seemed to show its limitations, he did not want to recognize the fact but had to do so. Einstein was much more willing than Planck to espouse the powerful quantum idea even if he was never fully reconciled to quantum theory.

Postmodernism denies that even the natural sciences are built on a firm basis of observable, objective facts because all phenomena are interpreted and expressed in language and language cannot ensure an extralinguistic reality. But a scientific construct (a concept invented for the particular discipline) is understood through experience (not through linguistic definition) in using the construct. While what attributes are associated with some construct can change with advances in science, this does not mean the construct consists of just words that have no reference to reality.

Postmodernism denies there are inherent differences between literature, science and the way reality is represented. Literature, science, and reality are texts like other cultural objects. Postmodernism here attempts to turn the tables on science. Scientists commonly demand that all inquiries, if judged to be knowledge-seeking, be conducted in a scientific way. The postmodernists say everything is just a text for analysis whether science or literature. And

whenever texts are interpreted there are always rival interpretations based on rival perspectives. And these perspectives can be incommensurable. But incommensurability simply says they cannot be reduced to some common scale: it does not mean they cannot be compared. Postmodernists also talk of all interpretation being theory-dependent when they mean concept-dependent in that if we lack the concept of a triangle, we will not interpret those lines on a sheet of paper as a triangle. In any case, when people are asked to tell us what they see in front of them, they are likely to provide the same description if they possess the same stock of concepts.

If we substitute model or paradigm for theory or perspective, postmodernists are saying that the marketing model or social science paradigm that is adopted determines what we see as well as what are chosen as the relevant facts. The model, perspective or paradigm adopted is the conceptual lens through which scientists view the area of interest. As an example there are the studies of the village of Tepoztlan in Mexico by two anthropologists Robert Redfield and Oscar Lewis (Coleman and Watson, 1992).[5] Because Redfield's perspective saw urban life as the source of cultural disintegration, rural Tepoztlan was interpreted as idyllic. On the other hand, from Lewis's perspective, peasant life was one of disease, poverty, and backwardness so his interpretation of village life in Tepoztlan was diametrically different from that of Redfield.

The postmodernist goes further, though, to argue that, because we look at the world through a particular perspective, we cannot have knowledge of an independent reality as all so-called facts are tied to conceptual viewpoints. Searle (1999) will have none of this.[6] Just because we always see reality from a point of view—what Searle calls *perspectivism*—it does not follow that we never directly perceive the independent reality. Just because I need a language to identify, describe, and communicate the facts, it does not follow that the facts as described have no independent existence. It is a fallacy to suppose that the linguistic and conceptual nature of the process of identifying facts means that the facts identified must be purely linguistic in nature.

As to the argument about different conceptual schemes providing different descriptions of reality, Searle sees these as analogous to different systems of counting: each system is capable of providing an alternative and true description of the world. He sees a failure here to distinguish observer-dependent concepts from observer-independent concepts. For him features of the world like force, gravitational attraction, and mass, are observer-*independent* in contrast to features of the world like, knife, chair or sentence in English which are observer-*dependent*. Gravitational attraction is a fact of nature while a knife is just the name we give to a sharp blade with a handle which fulfills the function of cutting. It is simply a non sequitur to reason from 'facts have to be interpreted', therefore, 'there are only interpretations and no facts'. We find a similar non sequitur when postmodernism argues that, because there is no absolute proof, all theories are equal to each other which denies the very idea of weight of evidence.

The claim that the interpretation of facts always depends on theories held, is also disputed by Hacking (1983).[7] He denies that *all* scientific observations are interpretations in the light of theories held. While agreeing that interpretation is always involved, he argues nonetheless that the early development of optics depended solely on noticing surprising phenomena that preceded any formulation of theory.

All knowledge is relative

Here we return to the topic of relativism. If we believe that everything can be treated as a text; that the method of investigating texts is through interrogation leading to interpretation and that there can be no right or wrong interpretations, we move towards *relativism* or the notion that no absolutes exist. This does not mean that the concept of 'text' is necessarily tied to relativism in that a text (like the bible) can be treated as a literal record of reality. To say something is "relative" is to say it varies from time to time and/or with circumstances. "Relative" contrasts with "absolute" which is that which does not vary with time or circumstances. Relativism is the doctrine that beliefs and principles are not universally valid across time and across cultures but are valid only for some historical period, some social group or the individuals holding them.

Isaiah Berlin (1981) distinguishes "pluralism" from relativism.[8] Cultural values can be incompatible, simply representing a *plurality* of values that cannot be structured hierarchically. After all, no two language cultures in the world order the world in exactly the same way. Pluralism is simply a matter of recognizing the fact that human goals are multiple, not all of them commensurable. This is different from relativism. Putnam (1981) defines relativism as the claim that there are no standards of truth or rationality that transcend particular cultural or linguistic communities.[9] He himself rejects relativism on the ground it undermines the distinction between a belief's being right and merely *seeming* to be right.

A *strong* relativist position is one that denies there are any universal standards. Thus strong moral relativism claims all moral beliefs are relative to the culture, the group or the individual: they are right for them. The most common objection to strong relativism is that in denying universal standards, it denies its own universal in saying that everything is relative. But this makes criticism of relativism into a straw man when more is needed. Thus, although we may not be able to verify moral standards by the methods of natural science, we are in a position to show the dysfunctional consequences of following no moral standards. Also some moral standards are better defended than others in terms of the basic need for survival; the need to belong and the need for order and security. As Rapport (1953) says, there is no point in trying to justify our pursuit of these four invariant needs.[10] Similarly, with regard to cultural *cognitive* relativism, we can point to the consequences of assuming beliefs are all equally acceptable.

Relativism embraces many different types of relativism, not all of them equally contested. Muncy and Fisk (1987) distinguish relativism from "relativity" in that relativity, in the sense of cultural relativity, simply claims that cultural entities must be understood in their cultural setting. In contrast, the relativist would go further and claim the culture provides all standards of evaluation.[11] Haack (1998) points to other distinctions such as ontological relativity; linguistic relativity; conceptual relativity; meaning-invariance relativity; and pluralistic relativity.[12] But whatever kind of relativism, she finds the idea that "true" makes sense only relative to some background theory, perspective or paradigm, an alarming claim. What about the truths of arithmetic like $2+2=4$? While she acknowledges that perception involves conceptualizing, she denies this requires us in any way to concede that reality is concept-relative. She points out that what demonstrates that our perceptions are still in contact with something real and independent of our expectations and interpretations, is the potential for surprise. Boghossian (2006) makes the needed distinction between relativism about truth and relativism about belief since beliefs are vulnerable to being relative to cultures but 'truth' is something else.[13] He shows in the most subtle of analysis the failure of the most sophisticated relativists to make a convincing case.

Several writers in marketing, (e.g. Anderson, 1983[14] and Peter and Olson, 1983[15]) talk about supporting a relativist orientation in marketing. In contrast, Hunt (1991) is a passionate advocate of freeing marketing from all forms of relativism.[16] What Hunt finds most objectionable is the implication in relativism that there are no objective appraisal criteria for evaluating beliefs and principles. He points out that just because no evaluative criteria guarantee certain knowledge, it does not mean that everything is relative to the culture, group or individual. Just because we cannot *absolutely* prove scientific laws does not mean we have no good reasons for believing them. With respect to cultural relativism, Hunt points out that the evidence suggests that the basic elements of morality and rational thinking are the same in all cultures.

Stanley Fish is a prominent postmodernist in the US. Fish's (1999) relativism arose from the recognition that there are no agreed ways of adjudicating between different interpretations of a literary text.[17] From this he moves (illicitly) to the conclusion that interpreters create their own meanings divorced from any guidance from the text. According to Fish, getting texts "right" is simply a matter of negotiation within the interpretive community. Truths are relative to particular interpretive communities whether in marketing, physics, psychology or literature. Interpretive communities (part of which are the review boards of the academic journals) appraise claims according to their relative persuasiveness and this has more to do with power and rhetoric than with the natural order of things.[18] It was on such a basis that Peter and Olson (1983) in an article entitled, *Is Science Marketing?* argued that science was a special case of marketing.[19]

The idea that the dominant interpretations are those belonging to the parties with the power to enforce their will is associated with Foucault (1972).[20] It is not uncommon for writers influenced by Foucault to explain everything from advertisements to sexuality in terms of this hidden control. (There is an echo in all this of Thrasymachus, the 5th century BC philosopher and Sophist who argued that justice was merely the interest of the stronger.) On this basis, whatever doctrines dominate in marketing academia are the doctrines advocated by those with the most power to close off other viewpoints. Foucault saw power as lying behind whatever goes under the name of truth. To believe something to be objective is to signal blindness to the role of power. There is no question of truth ultimately winning out; the powerful elites ensure their own views are the orthodox ones. Foucault used the term "archaeology" in the novel sense of digging below the surface of the text or discourse to look for the rules lying behind the content. He had an interest in studying the shifting power relationships and showed how progressive innovations in prisons or asylums simply extended the reach of state power into new areas of life.

While there are powerful voices in every discipline that make their views count, with so many outlets for novel views, few in the sciences would endorse the notion that 'might' is always to be considered 'right'. If one scientist cannot understand the argument of another, the two scientists may occupy different worlds of discourse and be unable to communicate with each other. But this view has not gone unchallenged. Just as different ways of classifying things depend on purpose, various ways of conceptualizing the world also depend on purpose. This does not mean these different ways of seeing the world are not comparable as they may simply represent different windows onto a problem.

One form of relativism promoted by postmodernists is that there is no universal rationality as different cultures exhibit different types of mentalities. However, Lloyd (1990) has illustrated how these so-called different mentalities represent nothing more than different cultures possessing different conceptual schemata which change through time and are influenced by other cultures.[21] John Searle (1999) also denies cultural relativism in terms of rationality and points out that, for example, when the Nuer (a tribe in Sudan) make sense of their claims, it turns out that they make sense by our standards. Hence the apparent irrationality within a tribal culture can be made intelligible by universal standards of rationality.[22]

A more circumscribed version of relativism is 'robust relativism' which avoids the usual charge of incoherence. This version is put forward by Joseph Margolis (1991).[23] *Robust* relativism is regarded as operating in 'carefully selected contexts of inquiry'. The robust relativist rejects the idea of 'truth' on the ground that there can be many truth-like claims that do not rule out all other claims that are 'incongruent' with them. He argues that the traditional truth-false dichotomy is rooted in 'archaism' or the idea that there is a fixed, objective reality against which claims can be tested by

a correspondence theory of truth, that is, tested by correspondence to the 'facts' in the world outside.

Robust relativism is simply recognizing there can be no certainty but this in itself does not constitute a justification of relativism. Of course, science cannot tell us *with certainty* what is true. There is no absolute (logical) certainty in this world since there is no absolute certainty to any prediction, scientific or otherwise. However much evidence we have for believing the consumer tomorrow will act as she has done today, we can never be sure. All prediction is to some extent a projection of ignorance. Science can only tell us what the evidence suggests comes closest to the truth at the time the question is posed. Yet as Thagard (2000) says, the advances made in the physical control of the world that have made possible the technologies of transportation, communication and medicine are totally mysterious unless theories such as gravity, electromagnetism, and the germ theory of disease are at least approximately true.[24] Cartwright (1993) shows in fact that physical laws are idealized claims (only approximately true) rather than being exactly true to reality.[25] Yet though the Second Law of thermodynamics is not absolutely true, it is very, very probable. As Giere (1999) argues, scientific theories are not so much making truth claims about the world so much as they define models that approximate reality: models that are similar to maps in being more or less accurate and more or less detailed.[26] There can be no claim to absolute truth. As Deutsch (1997) points out, even solipsism, the notion that only our own mind exists and what appears to be an external reality is just a dream, cannot be *logically* disproved beyond any doubt.[27] Yet it might be recalled, no one has witnessed any violation of the law of gravity (nothing has been seen to fall upwards).

Gellner (1995) argues that total relativism ends by underwriting cheap dogmatism as, if anything goes, you are allowed to be as utterly dogmatic as you wish (and many postmodernists are highly dogmatic) since the critical standards that might have inhibited such dogmatism, are nullified.[28] He points out that the "ecumenical relativist", eager to respect all systems of truth and value, finds himself committing the very sin he would wish to avoid, namely, endorsing evil regimes. In implicitly endorsing such systems by adopting relativism, the relativist pledges himself to spurning that which they spurn, within or outside their own borders.

Philip Kitcher (1993) claims that the logical positivists and their relativist postmodern opponents are just opposite sides of the same coin. While the logical positivists worshipped science for its claimed conformity to how the world is, the relativists condemn science for failing to live up to those standards. What unites both these views is the imposition of unrealistic standards for science to achieve.[29] As A.J. Ayer (1973) once said, it is in demanding impossible standards of perfection that the skeptic feels secure.[30]

Old ideas never die but hibernate for a more favorable climate. So it is with relativism. It is in tune with education systems that exalt pluralism of any sort *without* always evaluating what is being taken on board. Though this is

likely to be denied, it is also in line with the implicitly-held claim that the only *absolute* value is absolute toleration. Absolute toleration is an implicit tenet of postmodernity though, if we tolerate all, we teach nothing. Toleration, as the absolute value, means that justice, community well-being and even honesty are subordinated to 'being tolerant'. Well not quite, since in the Western world, people continue to condemn practices of other cultures that lead, say, to the exploitation of children or the subordination of women.

Social constructionism

Social constructionism in postmodernism is sometimes (wrongly) taken as implying a denial that there is a reality 'outside the text': that the human mind merely constructs reality. Postmodernists in fact accept that there is a reality 'out there' but say we have no access to it except through language. But if we ask scientists about the social construction of, say, quarks, do scientists actually believe this refers to something real or simply to the ideas scientists have of quarks? There is no contradiction between saying that something is real, yet socially constructed.

Postmodernists in their support of social constructionism acknowledge the existence of a real world independent of our observations. They are not in the business of showing that what scientists claim to be reality is divorced from any possibility of substantive content. At the most minimal level they are simply pointing out that how we describe and explain that world is socially constructed since all scientific vocabularies, like vocabularies generally, are socially constructed. How we conceptualize the world, how we think about things and whether certain things are even worth thinking about are not determined by the way the world is but by cultural and social factors. Social constructionists may take a term, such as consumer 'attitude' and point out that as a construct (a concept that is part of a discipline), it could perhaps be improved upon. More specifically, the postmodernist's aim is to 'unmask' the construct to show an 'extra-theoretical' function, undermining any claim that the construct represents a unique way of organizing reality.

There are several distinct ideas in social constructionism (Hacking, 1999).[31] The first is that the labels we give to things, like the name 'convenience goods', are produced by society itself. This is trivially true. The second view is that cultural *systems* like 'markets', 'money', 'Congress', the 'law' are socially constructed as they are social products of society. The argument here is that these things would not exist if we had not created them. If there had been a different type of society, where values and interests were different, these things might not have emerged or emerged in a very different form. No argument here either. These contrast with things that naturally exist in nature, which humans had no hand in creating or shaping beyond labeling like cows and sheep. The third view is the claim that, the way we think about things in the world, is not determined by the way the world is but by our being part of some society. This is where the controversy lies. It seems

obvious to non-postmodernists that anything that exists independently of human society such as quarks or dinosaurs could not have been socially constructed beyond being given a name.

A seminal work on social constructionism is Berger and Luckmann's *The Social Construction of Reality (1966)*[32] but, more recently, there has been John Searle's (1995) *The Construction of Social Reality* which makes a lesser claim for the scope of social constructionism while defending it against the charge of denying any reality beyond what society constructs.[33] *First*, he points out that the functions we emphasize are tied to our interests. Thus, because survival is a key value, we place emphasis on the function of the heart to pump blood, not to make a noise. Similarly, we emphasize the motivating function of emotion or its dysfunctional consequences in respect to decision-making. *These are socially constructed functions. Second*, Searle argues that the acceptance of socially constructed rules, like the traffic laws, rest on "collective intentionality" in the sense of collectively agreeing to something; culture is key to what rules are accepted. *Third*, Searle claims that social constructs involve rules about what constitutes a social construct like "attitude" and the rules that regulate the uses of that construct. But a test of a genuine social construct for Searle is whether or not we are able to explicitly codify the relevant rules for its use.

It is not the social construction of *ideas about human behavior* that causes controversy. It is accepted that mental constructs like self-esteem, attitudes, motives, and so on are not 'real entities' (natural kinds) in the brain but hypothetical constructs, that is, constructs that are created to explain some phenomena on the basis that they seem to be analogous to what appears to be happening in the mind. It is also accepted that many models in marketing and social science involve hypothetical constructs that lose touch with reality: variables in some mathematical model with no explicated links to the real world, just playing with symbols. This is becoming more pronounced with the focus on whether the methodology is new rather than the substance. Elegance and deductive rigor in economics are mainly achieved by putting to one side ignorance and uncertainty, to the detriment of relevance to the practical issues of life (Hutchison, 1994).[34] It is the recognition of all this that makes many in marketing and the social sciences wonder what all the fuss is about. But the natural sciences think differently.

The real controversy is about the social construction of knowledge in the natural sciences. The objection of those in the physical sciences lies in postmodernism's claim that physics and biology, say, could have evolved just as successfully without the discovery of quarks and genes. Natural scientists deny that progress to the outer reaches of physics and biology could have occurred without knowing of the existence of quarks and genes and that these are 'natural kinds' in nature and not social constructs. Science cannot construct things like quarks but simply discovers their existence in nature. Science advances on a foundation of knowledge that, with rare exceptions, remains extremely stable. This makes it difficult to claim that quarks are just

one way of constructing social reality as opposed to equating with something 'real' about nature. It also makes it difficult to accept that everything is in a state of flux as this assumes there is no extralinguistic reality. We have never come across a natural scientist who is a postmodernist.

While the shift from Aristotelian physics to Newtonian physics and perhaps the shift from Newtonian physics to quantum physics were paradigm shifts (a revolutionary scientific change in Kuhn's terms), it is denied that anything similar in physics has occurred since then. Contrary to the postmodernist position, we come back to the position already stated: scientific concepts (constructs) do not constantly change in meaning but simply come to have deeper meaning, leading to added properties (attributes) or a change in emphasis. Thus Putnam (1991) argues that the seeming changes in the meaning of scientific concepts are best described as successive changes in belief about the same object, not as a story about successive changes in meaning.[35] While social constructionism is not relevant to the facts studied by the natural sciences, beliefs can change about the facts. On the other hand, basic changes in concepts and meanings are common in social life. Thus some measures of 'attitude' (like the measure based on the concept of attitude consisting of cognitive, affective, and conative elements) have moved away from the original view of an 'attitude' being simply a predisposition to react in a particular way to some person, item or thing to embracing cognitive, evaluative, and conative components echoing Plato's concept of the mind that, unfortunately, is out of touch with today's cognitive psychology.

Science can be fully explained in terms of social determinants

The acceptance of a relativist position leads to the view that what prevails in science reflects the most persuasive rhetoric. This claim is made by many postmodernists. It is the position of Alan Gross (1999), a sociologist of scientific knowledge.[36] Throughout science he finds the subtle art of persuasion at work so that scientific knowledge becomes the sum of what scientists collectively persuade each other to believe. This is not quite the same as saying that the most powerful win out, since power also includes coercion and material incentives.

Much scientific discourse is indeed rhetorical. Peter and Olson are right to the extent that there is a marketing dimension to science. For instance, Darwin's *Origin of the Species* is steeped in rhetoric. Even scientists must put the best 'frame' around their ideas if colleagues are to be persuaded. In fact, as soon as we move away from putting across arithmetic, we are in the realm of persuasion (and many would not exclude arithmetic). Persuasive rhetoric, however, is but one determinant of what is accepted within the discipline.

Gross belongs to that group of sociologists who argue that whatever is accepted as true in science results from social factors. This is the view of the so-called "strong programme" (UK spelling) in the sociology of knowledge

which points to the importance of rhetoric in the adoption of theories (Bloor, 1983).[37] The strong programme claims additionally that all standards encountered in a social setting reflect the interest of those imposing the standards. Observation of nature does not make scientists agree on what constitutes a true account of that world. It is not just experience but cultural/social/group influences that determine what will be believed. On this basis, theory choice is far from being objective but reflects the particular scientific group's interest in maintaining and/or increasing the importance of its intellectual capital as reflected in its methods and techniques. The strong programme takes Popper and other philosophers to task for reconstructing the history of science to coincide with some normative, rational model that is at variance with what actually goes on. The strong programme downgrades the role of reason and the methods of scientific inquiry, in favor of rhetoric.

One postmodernist who focuses on rhetoric as the basis of acceptance is Stanley Fish (1995) who claims that establishing belief systems is a job for rhetoric as it is persuasion that determines, not reason or logic.[38] Strangely, he argues that *all* activity is rule-bound and we can't help doing what we do automatically, thus inadvertently putting forward a universal claim while elsewhere dismissing the very idea of such universals. While not doubting the need and the importance of persuasion in gaining acceptance, such persuasion may consist largely of demonstration that something works or is the most logical conclusion and may not resort to rhetorical tactics as we tend to view them: all persuasion cannot be equated with purely rhetorical endeavors.

Foucault followed Nietzsche in stressing the lust for power, with three topics dominating his writings. The first topic is society's barbarous treatment of social deviants. The second is his claim that we only make sense of our experiences through beliefs and ideas we just take on trust. On this view most information used in decision-making is derived, not through independent investigation, but from sources perceived as trustworthy. This is a view that is not emphasized enough in the buyer behavior literature and there is a need to determine the incidence of buying purely on the basis of what those considered trustworthy have to say. The Nietzsche view supports those who regard the consumer as mainly acting on unevaluated information from whatever sources are considered credible. One reason for this commonly occurring is today's overwhelming burden of stimuli bearing down on the consumer, giving rise to shorter attention spans that inhibit reflection.

For Foucault all forms of knowledge are used to support systems of power. The idea of a disinterested search of the truth is just absurd. Every law, value, and even habit of thought are all masks for bourgeois power (Eribon, 1992).[39] Freedom is a figment of modernist philosophy, given that we are all manipulated by whoever holds the power (Foucault, 1975).[40] All texts are thus perceived as tools in a power struggle, with the dominant texts reflecting the dominant power. The third topic is Foucault's work on the history of sexuality with the aim of putting across a deeper understanding of the

concept of sexuality itself. Like Marx, Foucault downplays the role of "human agency" in history, not surprisingly as he was a member of the French communist party early in his twenties. His focus is always on structures/systems not individuals. His work has considerably influenced the way reformers perceive incarceration, women's rights, and gay rights. But Hamilton (1998), in a highly entertaining way, demolishes much of Foucault's scholarship. For example, power elites do not always win. Hamilton shows how English juries in the 18th century refused to convict on capital charges, thwarting state power.[41] Power is a single motive view of motivation when the motives lying behind any action are apt to be many, varied, and conflicting. The idea, following Nietzsche, that the lust for power completely dominates action can be compared with the claimed dominance of the sexual motive among Freudians. Power is just one, albeit important, motive lying behind human actions.

Critics of the strong programme worry that treating science as something to be explained by social factors leads to the claim that science is purely a social construction or that science is simply a discourse (speech act) whose claims only make sense *relative* to a particular perspective or paradigm. Questions of truth in the sense of correspondence to reality become irrelevant with the dominant perspective simply reflecting what group holds most power.

Roth (1987) points out that much of the criticism leveled against Popper and other philosophers attacked in the strong programme could also be used to undermine the strong programme's case since it suggests its own claims are culturally/socially determined.[42] Hunt (1991) attacks the so-called "strong programme" in the sociology of knowledge insisting we should only look for social causes when it is evident there are no rational reasons underpinning the scientific claims. While, as a pragmatic rule, we support Hunt's position, it could nevertheless be argued that whatever led to the adoption of a knowledge claim is always a matter of empirical inquiry and never one for dogmatism. If the strong programme is wrong to assume the universality of (collective) causal social factors in adoption, it is also wrong to assume that, because a knowledge claim can be rationally defended against all criticism, such reasons were the *sole* basis for adoption.

While rejecting the primacy given to social factors in the adoption of a theory in marketing or elsewhere, it would be wrong to assume that factors other than rationality play no part in theory preference, particularly in marketing and the social sciences. While people will not believe black is white just because of self-interest or loyalty, these factors can make themselves felt in choice of theories. As Toulmin (1990) points out, if we wish to understand what convinced Newton about the truth of his scientific beliefs, we should do well to remove all limits on the factors that may be accepted as relevant. Thus the fact that Newton's theories about the heavens seems to mirror the Anglican Church hierarchy may have supplied Newton with additional reasons for adopting them.[43] Social factors do enter into what claims are accepted. Thus some marketing academics prefer to view marketing as

catering to 'needs' (little talk of wants) and eschew talk of manipulation. This viewpoint is attractive in being more socially acceptable to academics and marketers alike but gives inadequate direction and lacks explanatory force.

Science is carried out by humans who are naturally going to be influenced by political, economic, and ethical factors. However, this is something different from the claim that social factors are decisive, all a matter of persuasion and consensus. Taken literally the notion that all scientific knowledge is a social construction that comes about through the right rhetoric and power plays, denies altogether the role of the rational and the role played by nature, implying that the methods by which scientists establish new knowledge are completely disconnected from nature itself. That 'truth' is inextricably linked to rhetoric or that rhetorical analysis alone fully accounts for the content of science, would not be accepted by any scientist. It relegates the explanatory and predictive power of theories to having no cognitive content beyond their rhetorical elements. Only those unfamiliar with science and scientific inquiry (and postmodernists almost universally come from the humanities) would make such a claim since there is an overwhelming amount of empirical evidence in support of all its central claims. Of course, there is no final explanation of any phenomena and an initial explanation may lack depth, but this is something else.

Kitcher (1993) claims, contrary to postmodernists and relativists, victory in science does not typically go to the scientific power brokers who dominate the discipline by bullying fellow scientists into submission by controlling jobs, journals, and funds.[44] He shows, with historical examples stretching from Copernicus to Francis Crick and James Watson that scientific wars only terminate when compelling evidence decides the issue.

As Deutsch (1997) says, the more profound explanation has more generality, incorporates more connections between diverse findings and explains more with fewer unexplained assumptions.[45] As a consequence the discoverer of a theory, like Einstein, may have less understanding of the theory than later theorists. New explanations are judged on whether they leave fewer loose ends, require fewer and simpler postulates and mesh more easily with good explanations in other fields. And justification is not just a simple matter of confirmatory evidence. Justification requires a refutation of rival theories; confirming instances in themselves have no determining significance. In practice, this makes the acceptance of scientific knowledge something much more than a matter of rhetoric and social pressure. While it may be true that Galileo was very conscious of his patron's wishes and Newton had faith in alchemy and biblical numerology, the fact remains that their achievements in science are backed by masses of empirical findings. The fallacy of *argumentum ad hominem* applies here, that is, rejecting a person's claims by attacking something about him personally as opposed to providing evidence that his claims are incorrect. Similarly, the claim that modern science rests on knowledge that is no more firm than witchcraft and that it is impossible to establish any underpinnings for knowledge, is unlikely to have wide appeal, not even

among most postmodernists. While scientists might agree that social values enter into the context of discovery, in the context of justification it is the evidence that counts.

Scientific study is no different from literary studies

French postmodernism, as applied to the social sciences, is not concerned with adding to the store of knowledge but with undermining all claims to firm knowledge. This is because postmodernism argues that the social sciences are no different from the humanities generally. While the modernist tradition in science favors explanatory models and scientific methods of inquiry, the French postmodernists prefer story telling and claim that science has no privileged linguistic position. For postmodernists, all theory is specific to some context. In general we agree with this since explaining the particular event with any richness will inevitably take account of context. But postmodernists are apt to eschew 'theory' as a matter of principle. On the other hand, the *affirmative* postmodernists, unlike the French postmodernists, seek a postmodern social science that is descriptive, rather than causal and predictive, while focusing on the singular and the unique. Geertz (2000), interprets anthropological data in the way a literary critic might interpret a poem arguing an anthropologist cannot be precise about causal connections in the way a biologist might be.[46] Many social scientists have found Geertz's work liberating in freeing them from the impossible standards set by physics (usually 'the physics that never was'). Many in marketing who describe themselves as postmodernists do not subscribe to *all* the doctrines of postmodernism as described here but pick and choose: what unites them is a rejection of positivism and its search for causes but instead seek the meaning (significance) of events and actions for the person(s) involved.

If marketing or the social sciences used methods similar to literary studies, what would be involved? (Chaouli, 1999).[47]

First, literary critics, influenced by postmodernism, draw on Freud for ideas. This is not really surprising since Freudian psychology has been stranded between science and literature from the beginning. While Freudian psychology has lost the prestige it once had in psychology departments because of its lack of an empirical grounding, it has found a home in many humanities departments. But postmodernists vehemently eschew all totalizing theories and reject Freud's totalizing theory of the mind. Freud nonetheless influences postmodernism. The most important Freudian psychoanalyst among postmodernists is Jacques Lacan (Roudinesco, 1990).[48] The Freudian focus is on the hidden meanings in actions like buying. The key claim by Freud was that there are *meanings* that are highly significant for human well-beings that are obscured from immediate awareness. Whereas Freud's predecessors considered the unconscious as something ancillary to consciousness, Freud claimed it was just the opposite in that the most important mental processes occur in the unconscious (Person, 1996).[49]

Second, if marketing followed literary studies, Derrida and his deconstructionism would be a major tool. Derrida's *deconstruction* is a form of analysis that analyzes the interplay of signs but more specifically deconstruction finds the spur to change in what is absent in the text, the excluded 'other'. Whatever is signified by a sign (e.g. a brand name) simply leads on to other signifiers, like a dictionary might lead from just one definition to another. Thus the name Nike signifies expensive running shoes which, in turn, signify something else such as status, which signifies something else such as social visibility and so on. The signified of any sign is just a point in a chain that simply links one signifier to the next. This means there is no final cutoff that fixes a sign's content or meaning. In other words, the brand name Nike can have no fixed meaning, with individual consumers locating their own meaning. To the postmodernist, a brand image will vary among consumers influenced by context as context is likely to affect what signifiers are thrown up along the chain. The aim of poststructuralist analysis in using deconstruction is not to register meanings but to see where and how a text falls apart, that is, where its logic and coherence fail and, as a result, where the author can be said to have lost 'authority' over the text. Influenced by Derrida, postmodernists speak of 'locating' meaning in a text rather than discovering 'meaning' since there are multiple 'readings' (the more extreme postmodernists in fact prefer to avoid terms like interpretation, always substituting the word 'reading').

Derrida's strategy of *deconstruction* raises questions about all texts, whether a consumer protocol, a consumer questionnaire or any subject of interest, denying that the meaning of any text is settled. Deconstruction involves tearing apart a text on the ground that this will reveal its internal, arbitrary hierarchies and its presuppositions allowing us to trace the contradictions that shadow a text's coherence. Meaning is not regarded as inherent in the text but in the interaction between reader and text. The final word as to the meaning of a text does not reside with the author or the author's intentions because of the 'semantic autonomy' of language. In other words, language carries meaning that is independent of the communicative goals of the author. The diverse readings (interpretations) of a text oblige us to look beyond authorial intentions. A reader may note, for example, the binary opposites in the text such as 'male' and 'female' with one term given a privileged position in the text. What is advocated is a radical de-centering of such implicit hierarchies embedded in texts. According to Howells (2000), a Derrida admirer, deconstructive readings of texts aim not at revealing flaws in logic but at exposing the gap between authorial intention and textual meaning itself.[50]

The concept of deconstruction is a central canon of postmodernism. The deconstruction of a text looks beyond and away from the author's assumed intentions so as to critique concepts and hierarchies that link to the traditional criteria of certainty, identity, and truth. For Derrida (1991) cultural life consists of the production of "texts", intersecting with other texts.[51] In the reading of texts, meaning is always negotiated, with emphasis on the

'subversive', with postmodernists claiming to see subversion everywhere, even seeing oppositional readings in Nazi films.

What critics find puzzling about Derrida's deconstructionism is how we are to unambiguously comprehend deconstruction's own propositions when Derrida uses language to claim that language cannot make unambiguous claims! Suffice to say that deconstruction would not allow any validity claims beyond subjective feelings. Interpretation of buying behavior could never end in any consensus. Derrida leaves whatever is signified unanchored to any determinate meaning. We are left without any clues as to why any text can be meaningful, either in terms of what it refers to in the world 'out there' or what someone must know to claim he understands the language. Of course there is vagueness and ambiguity about any isolated text. This sort of vagueness and ambiguity would be lethal if it were not for the fact that communications are interpreted within some specific context that removes the ambiguities.

Derrida is the most controversial figure in postmodernism. He has influenced not just literary theory but disciplines like law, history, and architecture. On the other hand, critics argue his claims would undermine all intellectual inquiry if accepted. This is because, unlike the skeptic who applies objective criteria to challenge the existing orthodoxy, Derrida acknowledges no such criteria while it is considered absurd to claim that all texts and all interpretations of texts are of equal standing. This denies a distinction between texts and between interpretations that are trivial and those that are important. Surely does not experience itself tell us there are plausible and implausible interpretations? Similarly to deny any distinction between fact and fiction, observation and imagination, makes the concept of science and scientific inquiry just appear ridiculous. Deconstruction, with its avowed aim of denying any claims to truth, could never have any place in science as we know it.

One constant critic of Derrida is Brian Vickers (1999). In a review of several books written on and by Derrida he complains bitterly of Derrida's distortions of Saussure and his complete ignorance of modern linguistics outside of Saussure's original work.[52] He agrees with those who claim that Derrida misread Husserl, misrepresented his arguments, inserted claims Husserl never made, overlooked key texts which would have undermined his own claims and distorted C.S. Peirce's work—and all were self-serving distortions. Raymond Tallis (1997) seems to regard the whole postmodernist thought as having a political tendency that is both revolutionary and ultimately nihilistic. For him, Derrida's motive is exhibitionism.[53]

Political radicalism gave the impetus to French postmodernism. Derrida's aim is to take apart the whole system of Western thought since the time of Plato on the ground that it has been led astray by failing to grasp the nature of language and meaning. He attacks the very idea of a concept being apprehended without first being mediated by signs. This is debatable. For example, we can immediately grasp when water is hot, without any sign interpretation (Harris, 1996).[54]

Third, there would be links to Karl Marx. Postmodernists (a) dismiss Marx's totalizing or metanarratives of history; (b) reject his historical materialism; (c) diminish his focus on the class struggle; and (d) reject his labor theory of value and perhaps even his political theories. However, they tend to accept his theory of alienation, that is, that human beings are alienated from their real (creative) selves because they live in exploitative relationships. Marxism is generally influential in postmodernism, claiming every law and proclaimed set of values are simply masks for holding onto power. For Foucault (1975) courts, police, asylums, hospitals, the press, television and the state are all intolerable. For Derrida (1998), though he rejects Marx's economics and philosophy, his own deconstructionism he considers to be a radicalization within the spirit of Marxism.[55] Derrida believes the only way to achieve the democratic values in the West that he espouses, is to destroy the language which upholds a contrary position—as if it is just language that makes Western democracies imperfect. Yet Marx's view of historical development towards some end stage of economic justice conflicts with postmodernism's world where talk of ultimate liberation and absolute truth simply evokes illusory hopes. But something of Marx still remains strong in postmodernism.

Jhally (1990), in line with Baudrillard, claims to bring Marx up-to-date by arguing it is the *symbolic*-meaning given to a product by advertising that provides the product with an exchange-value in excess of what the brand would command for its utilitarian use-value: advertising builds symbolic-meaning into a product and in the process makes a fetish of the product.[56] Jhally takes to task those critics of advertising who talk about manipulating consumers into desiring things they do not really need, and those critics who focus on the purely utilitarian uses of products, ignoring their symbolic-meaning. On the other hand, he argues the defenders of advertising, while recognizing the symbolism that can attach to products, do not face up to the social consequences of advertising. Jhally claims that it is control over symbolism, not the contradictions in the means of production (as claimed by traditional Marxist dogma), that has become the key focus in advanced capitalist societies and this control over symbolism necessitates the mastery, control, and manipulation of the symbolic codes through which products are given their meaning. It is the meaning given to a product by advertising that provides the product with exchange-value in excess of what the brand would command for its utilitarian use-value. For Jhally, advertising builds meaning into a product, making a "fetish" out of it. Making a fetish of a product is to invest it with magical powers it does not have but is made to appear to have. There is a human need that searches for meaning and the symbolism inserted by advertising provides this meaning.

Jhally agrees that advertising is the major source of product information but argues that with TV there is too little time for "reason-why" advertising so the focus is on entertaining, lifestyle advertising, facilitated by psychographic segmentation. In this way advertising focuses on creating advertising

that resonates with the values and beliefs of the target audience to create pleasurable feelings that will be transferred to the brand and recalled when the product is sighted in the store. Advertising relates the product or brand to the consumer by way of symbolism; a symbolism that seeks to make a fetish of the product. In response we would argue that all this depends on advertisers knowing the symbolic code (what signs symbolize what) to develop ads that will project the meaning desired and get the audience to interpret the codes of advertising in the way desired.

What particular meaning does the advertiser try to build into brand advertising? Jhally suggests the following meanings as transmitted by advertising:

- personification (human qualities attributed to the brand)
- positive emotional impact from using the brand
- brand use as having the power to transform the user, for example, making the user more attractive
- brand possession/use as having the power to complete social relations
- brand use as mediating or making certain relations possible
- brand's mere presence making a situation more meaningful
- brand as capturing certain natural forces

But is not Jhally exaggerating the power of advertising? His characterization of the consumer as (i) desperately searching for meaning in a world where traditional informational anchors are no longer in place, and (ii) looking to the media (mainly TV) as the only source that gives meaning to products (a meaning which the consumer just passively accepts, unconsciously or consciously) is a distorted characterization. He goes along with Baudrillard in arguing that, through the manipulation of the symbolic code, any object can take on any symbolic-meaning regardless of its physical attributes. But whatever symbolic codes exist, they would still need to be known (codified) if they are to be used by advertisers; until then advertisers must rely on their own intuitions as to what is likely to symbolize what: Jhally credits advertising agencies and marketers with more knowledge than they possess. Marketers have long accepted the limitations of their persuasive abilities and recognize that it is the total integrated system of product, packaging, branding, pricing, distribution, and promotion that constitutes the offering to the consumer and advertising cannot long term make up for functional deficiencies in that offering.

We are reminded here of Gramsci's theory of hegemony.[57] Gramsci, as a prisoner in Mussolini's Italy, pointed out that, even for a totalitarian regime, rule must be based on consent but that consent may be manipulated. The 'hegemony' that is sought arises from power based on building cultural and political consensus through creating, via the media, dominant political and cultural ideologies. The media is an important instrument in persuading people to be consumers and influencing them generally in interpreting advertisements, TV programs, and so on. Gramsci refers to the practice of what

Karl Marx called "false consciousness." When Marx referred to "false consciousness" he was not referring to how the unconscious can mislead but to how those in power can get people to believe things that are false and against their best interest.

Fourth, if literary criticism were to guide marketing, the traditional idea of scientific inquiry would be abandoned. Instead we would substitute experiential descriptions. But would this always give the depth of explanation and accuracy needed? For instance, Paul Treguer (2000) who chairs an advertising agency which focuses on marketing to senior citizens, is reported as having lots of experience in marketing to senior citizens (Tromans, 2000).[58] He claims from his experience that consumers over the age of 50 years are the most discriminating, educated, rational, and experienced of all consumers—and most careful in making up their minds and slow to decide. But the evidence from cognitive psychology, based on experimentation, paints a different picture (Park and Gutchess, 1999).[59] Older people are shown to have more difficulty with comprehension; to have limited information processing capacity; to seek out less information when making a decision; tend to make rapid decisions as compared with younger adults; more willing to rely on advice; make fewer comparisons among options and exhibit less sophisticated reasoning—and a decreased ability to ignore distracters. Which view has more the ring of truth and which would you be more prepared to accept?

All cultural texts must be treated equally

Integral to postmodernism is equal treatment of all cultural texts. This is consistent with postmodernism's contempt for the distinction between high and low culture. Thus the textual study of soap opera receives the same critical scrutiny as a classical text while equal dignity is ascribed to ephemera. As Shakespeare and soap opera both give pleasure, are they not therefore equal? One advocate goes so far as to argue the difference between Shakespeare and Mickey Mouse is simply the difference between a hoagy and a pizza! But to deny that some experiences are not more uplifting than others, that there are no ethical differences between pornography and writings to elevate the status of women, while consistent with relativism, coarsens society and demeans women. There is a willful failure to think about the consequences for society, as if consequentialism (one version of which is utilitarianism), as an ethical philosophy, can be completely dismissed.

General criticism of postmodernism; hermeneutics as a traditional alternative to achieve methodological pluralism

The failure to think out the consequences for society has been a major criticism of postmodernism. And failure to think out consequences is not just

irrational stance, it can be unethical. As Lazere (1992) says, in talking about teachers influenced by deconstruction, they

> think it's a fine idea to tell children or college remedial writing students that they don't need to learn to read accurately because all meaning is indeterminate, that they don't need to learn the conventions of written English because they are all arbitrary, and that they don't need to learn to make moral or aesthetic judgments because they are no more than forms of social domination. That way lies madness.[60]

Habermas (1985) has been a constant critic as he regards the postmodern 'mood' as a turning away from responsibilities.[61] Ernest Gellner (1992), in an attack on postmodernism, offers the most robust defense of the Enlightenment intellectual tradition in contrast to postmodernism.[62]

We need an infusion of theory into marketing in order to conceptualize, provide sensitizing concepts, give direction, and allow talk about marketing to be conducted in an intelligent manner. We need standards for without standards, there can be no evaluations and to rule out judgments of better and worse reduces marketers to merely expressing differences. If evaluations are ruled out, judgment is abandoned. Many of those in marketing, however, who talk about subscribing to a postmodern approach are merely emphasizing the rejection of the methodology of seeking causes as per the natural sciences and stressing the need for some interpretive approach in a search for meaning or, alternatively are merely declaring their support of perspectivism. But interpretive approaches that seek the most coherent interpretation are rejected by French postmodernists on the ground that all 'readings' are equivalent. For postmodernists all interpretations are up for negotiation as per Derrida's deconstructionism.

Postmodernists always reject the 'monistic view' of interpretation that claims there is a correct interpretation for every text or that any conflict among interpretations can be overcome by a 'super-interpretation' which takes account of what is true in each of the conflicting interpretations. Postmodernism denies there is just one correct interpretation since any number of interpretations meet the criteria for acceptance. They reject the idea of a uniquely correct interpretation as simply dogmatism. Many of us outside postmodernism are sympathetic to this view as logic and the evidence may not be determining. Not surprisingly, the deconstructionist view of literary meaning is pluralistic since the very idea of any final determinacy of meaning is rejected for all texts. There is indeed no single correct interpretation of marketing data. However, this does not rule out the notion of some interpretations being manifestly better than others in that they cohere more with the evidence and rely less on conjecture. The natural sciences make many assertions that are not open to negotiation. This is because there are facts which cannot be ignored. Scientists argue that the natural sciences are not just another language game and natural scientists are generally wedded to

some form of scientific realism whether interpreted in terms of the reality of scientific theories or in terms of the reality of scientific concepts like quarks. They reject the postmodernist view that scientific theories are simply the ways adopted to organize experience.

When it comes to the social sciences like marketing, *complete* objectivity is not attainable and claims need to be modestly asserted. Many postmodernists seem to assume, though, that modernity is monolithic. This is not so. There were and are philosophers and social scientists who view the attempt to investigate all disciplines by the methods of natural science as misguided on the ground that this tends to work against sensitivity to uniqueness, or encourages stressing uniformity at the expense of richness of content and variety. The insistence on *methodological monism* would confine marketing to what can be subsumed under the methods of the natural sciences, rejecting as just unknowable any approach to questions not amenable to these methods.

Side by side with the urge by marketing academics to make marketing follow the natural sciences in methodology, there is the interpretive tradition focusing on the search for meaning or significance to the consumer. It was Wilhelm Dilthey (1833–1911) who made a sharp distinction between *causal explanation* as applied to the natural sciences and understanding as applied to the humanities: Nature we explain: psyche life we understand. Jerome Bruner (1990) argues that to insist in psychology upon explanation in terms of (physical) "causes" bars us from trying to understand how human beings interpret their worlds and how we interpret their acts of interpretation.[63] He goes on in the same *preface* to ask: "Are not plausible interpretations preferable to causal explanation, particularly when the achievement of a causal explanation forces us to artificialize what we are studying to a point almost beyond recognition as representative of human life?"

Hirsch (1976) adds that, to avoid a "babel of interpretations", there is a need to distinguish between "meaning for the author" and its "significance for the interpreter."[64] It is the significance or meaning for the interpreter that is of concern. When it is the meaning intended by the author, however, a meaning is sought that is stable. Unfortunately, an author's intention is not always transparent and postmodernists are inclined to dismiss it altogether. In any case, postmodernists are right in claiming that language generates fresh meaning irrespective of the author's intentions. It is this interest in the personal meaning of texts that links postmodernism with many who study buyer behavior.

The attack on the idea of 'facts' that are not simply the interpretations of an interpretive community, is important for undermining the claims of science and follows from the belief that the natural sciences proceed by the method of induction. This is just not so though, at one time, induction was put forward as 'the' scientific method by positivist philosophers. The assumption was made that, if a large number of observational facts converge on one viewpoint, and none deviate from it, the hypothesis or theory is validated. No scientist today believes that science proceeds from extrapolating or

generalizing from the results of many observations (Deutsch, 1997).[65] In fact it is not possible to extrapolate from observed 'facts' unless they are placed in an explanatory framework and different explanatory frameworks lead to different predictions from the same observations.

Scientific laws do not emanate from the collection of a lot of facts but on having the right concepts and an explanatory theory that covers an infinity of otherwise indigestible facts. Facts in science become only so after being explained. As Deutsch says, prediction is part of the *method* of science but the main reason theories are rejected is because they are bad explanations, not because they necessarily fail experimental tests. Unfortunately, all too commonly marketing journals are apt to forget this and success in prediction is equated with proof. Deutsch claims no scientific reasoning has ever fitted the inductivist position. This is in contrast to Fish, a non-scientist, who puts forward the claim that theory cannot guide or indeed exert any critical function. This is contrary to experience. Deutsch regards explanatory theory as basic to improving techniques, concepts and the language with which we are trying to understand the world. He points out that we understand reality only by understanding the theories that explain it. As he says, the two deepest theories in physics—the general theory of relativity and quantum theory—provide the detailed explanatory and formal framework within which all other theories in modern physics are expressed and they contain physical principles to which all other theories in physics conform.

Some of the philosophical background to postmodernism

Postmodernism (at least the French version) is full of contradictions that are infuriating to anyone not of the faith. Pauline Rosenau's (1992) book highlights many of these contradictions.[66] In fact, the postmodernists' denial of truth is a contradiction in terms since, if there is no truth, their own claim that there is no truth cannot claim to be true. While asking nothing demanding of themselves, postmodernists seek to undermine all scientific achievement. Putting astrology on the same level as astronomy assumes both make claims that are equally warranted. (In fairness, no American or British postmodernist makes this claim but other postmodernists say things equally as silly.)

Susan Haack (1998) makes some of the most trenchant criticisms of postmodernism's claims though her focus is more on the philosophers who lend them support.[67] Some recent philosophy does seemingly lend support, such as the work of Thomas Kuhn (1967)[68] and Paul Feyerabend (1975).[69] Also the 'new' physics exemplified by the (as yet not reconciled) Einstein's (special) relativity theory and Planck's quantum mechanics with its underwriting of indeterminacy, have been interpreted as supportive of a postmodernist science.

It was Nietzsche who asserted the primacy of 'perspective' or the notion that we always view the world from some particular perspective and that

there is no privileged perspective showing the world as it truly is (Richardson, 1997).[70] This is interpreted as rejecting the notion of truth. Nietzsche saw the search for truth as reflecting a desire for a firm foundation for one's ideas, resulting from a fear of the potentially chaotic diversity of nature. But perspectivism can be viewed as a belief in providing different windows onto a problem or event. While each perspective offers some light on the truth, some perspectives for certain purposes are more useful and more valid than others.

Feyerabend today is categorized as a postmodernist (though it is uncertain whether he even knew the term!) whose "anything goes" slogan is similar to Lyotard's (1984) declaration that science is best characterized by a proliferation of theories.[71] Although Feyerabend's book *Against Method* is not in fact against method but simply against those who claim that there is one best methodology for science to follow in its quest for knowledge. For him there is no one best way but lots of ways to achieve sound knowledge. He is against any form of intellectual or ideological dominance. Nonetheless he did suggest that science was corrupted by arbitrariness and irrationality. And he did argue that appeals to rationality and to evidence amounted to nothing but rhetorical bullying. Feyerabend's claim that observations and theoretical terms are all paradigm-dependent would, if accepted, undermine science as we know it. Similarly, Kuhn argues there is no sharp distinction between observation and theory since theory influences what is observed. However, Nagel (1979), the philosopher of science who did most to help social science establish itself as a science, denies that all observation terms involve theory and are therefore unavoidably "theory laden."[72] He claims in fact that

> . . . most if not all the terms employed in describing the observations that are made with the intent of testing a given theory usually have established meanings that are not assigned to those terms by the very same theory . . . . It is simply not true that every theory has its own observation terms, none of which is also an observation term belonging to any other theory. (p.93)

(As was said earlier there is a confusion between observation being theory-dependent and being concept-dependent. The latter is more true since concepts are basic to all classification.) Hacking (1983) similarly argues that it is false to assume that observational reports *always* embody theoretical assumptions unless Feyerabend subsumes under the word "theory" every assumption being made. If this is, in fact, Feyerabend's definition of theory, then the assertion that every observational report is theory-loaded may be true, but trivial. Hacking agrees that we typically see things because we have a theory that points in that direction, but it is also possible on occasions to notice things because there is no theory to give direction. Finally, Nagel (1979) makes the point, that even though the weight of evidence for some

given statement may not be measurable, it is often possible to objectively evaluate the evidence to judge (say) whether it is adequate.

> even when individuals make their assessments independently of one another, they concur in their evaluations more frequently than is compatible with the supposition that evaluations are wholly subjective and idiosyncratic.
>
> (p.91)

Nagel points out that the principles of scientific method were never meant to be applied without qualification or without reference to the contexts in which the principles are to be used. He sees no rigid or exhaustive set of rules as being traditionally advocated since all methodological rules are candidates for adoption, and that only experience in

> applying a rule can provide the needed evidence for deciding whether or not the rule contributes to the success of inquiry.
>
> (pp.87–8)

Feyerabend in taking an extreme position is following his own maxim on the need to dramatize if existing orthodoxy is to be undermined. But Feyerabend has a point if he is arguing that there can be no closure on rationality since new considerations, additional reasons, develop along with experience. Just as buying is a learning experience so that buyers change their minds during the process of buying, so scientists change their minds about what constitutes rationality in the circumstances or after having more familiarity with the data and the domain. Many social scientists and marketers rightly champion this view of there being no closure on what constitutes rationality even if, for some, it took Feyerabend's gross exaggeration to make them recognize it more clearly.

Le Fanu (2000) shows that progress in medicine has been far removed from what we consider to be the scientific method.[73] In the first place, progress owes a good deal to pure chance while observation and insight rather than technology and experimentation have often produced the most significant step forward. Indeed the most vital element in success typically has involved some driven individual, unwilling to be put off by setbacks. Le Fanu, for example, shows how heavily financed chemistry randomly produced remedies that eluded more theory-driven scientists and the more rational, less random approaches. But carried to extreme the principle 'anything goes' frees scientific discourse from any constraints whatever. It suggests we abandon any attempt at objectivity in science on the ground of its being an impossible goal.

While objectivity cannot be guaranteed by the methods of science, it can and does emerge from the integrity of individual scientists and the open debate over scientific findings. If 'anything goes' is simply a recognition of *methodological* pluralism, this is to be endorsed as methodological pluralism recognizes that different subject matter requires different methods

of investigation, while rejecting the belief that there is just one set of methods that provides a privileged, universal access to both reality and truth. If marketing is to address a full range of relevant questions, it cannot just confine itself to the methods of the natural sciences. The particular method used must relate to the type of understanding or explanation it seeks. We agree with Taylor (1983) that humans are beings for whom the question arises of what significance (meaning) things have for them and this question may not be answered by the information processing approach of cognitive psychology. The metaphor of the computer, is inadequate for understanding the consumer.[74] Sherry (2000) in fact claims that, in consumer research, the postmodern era goes from 1983–1992 while the methodological pluralists, with their multidisciplinary cross-training, have been in the fore since 1992.[75] We would like to think so but it seems a bit of wishful thinking. One can only wonder where all this interdisciplinary learning has taken place given the trend has been to more and more specialization in marketing and the social sciences generally. The result is the growth of specialized journals so there is not even a need to talk to each other.

Feyerabend and Kuhn popularized the view that successive scientific paradigms in the history of science can be shown to have been "incommensurable", that is, there was no shared language to determine which was best. That for theories, endorsed before and after a conceptual revolution, the very language in which they are stated, and the values upheld, are so different that they are in effect incommensurable. We have challenged this view earlier but it is not entirely clear that this is Feyerabend's position on incommensurability or whether he has been incorrectly interpreted (Terpstra, 2000).[76]

Kuhn focuses on tradition and the collective judgment of scientists working within that tradition as determining or at least influencing what is acceptable while he claims there are no paradigm-neutral standards of evidence. Evidence is always *relative* to the paradigm (perspective) adopted. In other words, the paradigm of cognitive psychology would have its own standards for what it considered to be evidence as would the paradigm of behaviorism. Furthermore, Kuhn argues, science does not progress in an evolutionary way but through revolutions whereby new paradigms arise which are incommensurable with the old. A scientific revolution wins out more through propaganda and control of resources than through any objective weighing of the relative evidence. Scientists resist the new paradigm with any eventual conversion being like a religious conversion.

We questioned such claims earlier. Incommensurability is denied by scientists who argue that, though meanings change, they do so in the direction of increased richness in beliefs and so do not lose their ability to relate to past theories. The 'thing' itself does not change but judgments change based on a richer set of beliefs. Thus Deutsch (1997), an Oxford physicist, comments on the Kuhnian thesis:[77]

> But Kuhn is mistaken in thinking that holding a paradigm blinds one to the merits of another paradigm, or prevents one from switching

> paradigms, or indeed prevents one from comprehending two paradigms at the same time.... Kuhn's theory suffers from a fatal flaw. It explains the succession from one paradigm to another in sociological or psychological terms, rather than as having primarily to do with the objective merit of the rival explanations.... I have never come across anything like the Kuhnian situation... The discovery of quantum theory was a conceptual revolution, perhaps the greatest since Galileo, and there were indeed some 'old fogies' who never accepted it.... But the major figures in physics, including almost all those who could be considered part of the physics establishment, were immediately ready to drop the classical paradigm.
>
> (pp.323–7)

Susan Haack (1998) argues that the claim that evidence is paradigm-bound has led to the erroneous conclusion that the standards of what is considered good or bad evidence is also culture bound.[78] This is not so. She argues that the New Cynics (the whole set of postmodernists plus their supporters in philosophy) make two errors. The first in not making a distinction between the *warrant-status* or evidential support for a theory and its *acceptance-status* which is the standing of the theory in the eyes of the scientific community. The focus on the acceptance-status of a theory allows the postmodernists to view science on their own terms as a purely social activity. But the acceptance-status and the warrant-status must be separated even if highly correlated. It does not follow from the fact that a warranted theory can turn out to be wrong, that evidence never establishes anything. The second error lies in failing to distinguish the *worth* of evidence for a theory from the problem of how to conduct inquiry. We have good ways of assessing the value of evidence in terms of its truth-likeness (*verisimilitude*) but the methods of scientific inquiry are still mainly at the level of guidelines and heuristics.

Take, for example, Popper's falsification principle in scientific inquiry. While the physicist Deutsch (1997) underwrites Popper's (1972) view about scientific methodology, Popper's focus on the falsification of hypotheses is a doubtful way to proceed.[79] Nagel's (1979) criticism of falsificationism is that it fails to show how knowledge could advance through applying tests designed to falsify hypotheses.[80] As Ravetz (1990) says, if the hypothesis is falsified, we gain only the knowledge that some particular hypothesis is false.[81] On the other hand, if the test does not falsify we learn only that the hypothesis has not yet been proved false: as a principle of method such an approach is bankrupt. Ravetz also points out that the theory of evolution seems structurally incapable of falsification but is accepted simply on the ground that it appears the only conceivable rational explanation of how the rich and subtle order of nature has come to be.

Anything good in postmodernism?

If postmodernism has been influential in the humanities, it has also had a bad press as the more extreme views (rationally indefensible views) tend to be quoted. Thus most postmodernists deny they believe there are no defensible

values or any reality outside of the text. They claim that they are mainly concerned to question the assumptions on which taken-for-granted values and assertions are based, pointing out that new metaphors and other literary forms are the basis for capturing new aspects of reality. Few marketing academics would disagree here. There is in every discipline what the Greeks called *nomoi*, the set of foundation beliefs (e.g. customer orientation in marketing) that are so accepted as to become part of the unquestioned background to all else. This constitutes a perspective against which all else is judged. Critical thinking about marketing begins with the questioning of marketing's *nomoi*. Postmodernists are right to ridicule the idea that the methods of the natural sciences are the only way to go and to remind us that rhetoric and the framing of an issue do count in persuasion and that people can be very far removed from the normative model of rationality.

If extreme postmodernist views are the straw men for critics, it is still true that these views need to be attacked. Thus we have Foucault's claim about our seeking knowledge purely to gain power; that there is no truth but statements that are legitimate or illegitimate in the light of existing power relationships. There is also the suggestion of postmodernists, such as Baudrillard, that there is no genuine distinction between truth and untruth (Norris, 1991).[82] If the humanities were to accept many of these views, we can only say how awful it would be *not* to find value in literature, to explore it for what is illuminating about life, but instead to deconstruct it or search for the power behind the viewpoint.

The good side to postmodernism lies in its attack on the more dogmatic versions of rationality and pretensions to final truth. The crass dogmatism and abuse of 'expert' authority in all fields do need to be contested and marketing is certainly no exception. Best and Kellner (1997) argue that postmodernism obliges us to reflect and rethink many of our basic presuppositions, methods, and modes of practice. Though sympathetic to moderate (affirmative) postmodernism, they recognize that many postmodernist claims are extreme, failing to provide empirical evidence for their claims.

As in the sciences generally, there is a need in marketing for a more critical stance. It is not uncommon in marketing to move from ignorance to fallacies such as the move from ignorance about consumer decision-making to the fallacy that consumers follow the multi-attribute model in decision-making. (It is not even 'as if' consumers behave that way except in a laboratory setting where information is fed to them to bring about such action. Predicted results offer no guidance as to the antecedent mental processes involved.) Best and Kellner (1997) talk of postmodern theory having influenced every contemporary theoretical discipline. This all depends on what is considered postmodern theory. There is no postmodern theory as such. There are only the writings of people categorized as postmodernist and we doubt that many natural scientists will have heard of any of them. Talking about theory in postmodernism is not like talking about Marxism which does have a core set of doctrines. All that can be said is that those confronted with having to refute postmodernist theses will find intellectual payoff. But, as we

argued earlier, writers pushing radical skepticism in the past have had the same effect (Harman, 1973).[83] Best and Kellner argue that postmodern "science" has arrived with a new mode of scientific thinking based on concepts like entropy, evolution, organism, indeterminacy, probability, relativity, complementary, interpretation, chaos, and complexity. All these concepts were, however, out and about without any of their originators having heard of postmodernism. Best and Kellner boost the legitimacy of postmodernism by implicitly suggesting its ideas were behind some of today's central conceptual innovations or that postmodernism is an all-pervasive zeitgeist affecting all disciplines. If we confine postmodernism to the writings reviewed here, this seems doubtful. Changes are being made all the time either towards or away from the postmodern paradigm. Thus while extreme determinism has gone from physics, it seems that recent biology has become more deterministic and less organismic.

Best and Kellner claim that both modern and postmodern science utilize experimental and empirical methods involving hypotheses, observation, experiment, and prediction and that both are interested in detecting order and in discovering laws and regularities. On the other hand, they argue postmodern science moves more toward probability and statistical regularities and away from absolute certainty; that postmodern science rejects notions of fixed immutable order and absolute truth in favor of conceptions of evolving complexity and probability, so breaking away from the mechanistic metaphor to affirm organism and biological models. This is a view of postmodernism falling into the 'after modern', category. It bears little resemblance to what the major postmodernist writers endorse, as their own book testifies. This latter view of postmodernism (if it can be recognized as such) is so far removed from the postmodernism we have discussed that it would hardly cause any major controversies if this were all postmodernism was claiming. (Much of this is in conflict with what the authors have to say about postmodernism in the body of the text and one feels the authors just failed to reconcile their individual contributions.)

We agree that scientists, eager to stress the distinctiveness of science, do err in suggesting a science of timeless laws and eternal truths, in contrast with social science composed of ephemeral claims. But the desire to join the scientific elite has pushed marketing into too much abstractness and formality in the hope of sharing the prestige of the name 'science', often showing scorn for any explanation that does not borrow from the jargon of a 'scientific' paradigm. Much of it has meant sacrificing reality for intellectual rigor, leading to a good deal of conceptual confusion manifested in technological decoration.

There is no such thing as finality in science or in marketing since assumptions can always be questioned. We have already quoted Bonjour (1998) who shows that every claim or justification leads in a final analysis to the acceptance of a foundation based on the intuitiveness of its propositions.[84] This is not to say that we are sympathetic to the postmodernist

undermining of the claims of science. After all, the same laws of science are validated by men and women in every culture. But at the same time it is only right to reject the view of science as pristine, pure, and authoritative in all respects.

Postmodernism sensitizes us to the complexities of meaning inherent in media texts and how texts can be subject to multiple interpretations, for example, how a seemingly ideologically-saturated message can be undermined by surface decoration such as a raised eyebrow. Postmodernism attunes us to this because it does question notions of authorial intent and portrays textual meanings as free floating. There can be objections to this but it can be useful to advertising because the social-political content of ads may sometimes have to be ambivalent to stimulate sections of the target audience to avoid, for example, declaring openly whether pro-feminist, socially conservative, pro-family or anything else.

We agree with Best and Kellner (1997) that moderate or affirmative postmodernism is not a rupture with modernity but an intensification of modernity as it comes to grips, in a more sophisticated way, with such concepts as rationality, truth, and determinism. This is so even if the prefix 'post' suggests not just 'after' modernity but 'against' modernity. The distinction is less between the modern and the postmodern than it is between the ancient and the modern. Being justifiably critical of various aspects of modernity does not undermine the whole of modernity and we should not throw out the baby with the bath water. Postmodernism is a slogan of dissent against domination, intellectual or otherwise, and the current obsession with technique and the rule-imposed, mechanization of reason.

Kirsh (1983) talks about the relevance of philosophical research to the human sciences and discusses five areas in which philosophical research is useful, namely: (1) questioning methodological assumptions; (2) operationalizing concepts; (3) conceptual analysis; (4) pragmatic issues; (5) questioning basic conceptual propositions.[85] Would his suggestions on philosophical research be more worthwhile than considering the postmodernists' critique? Kirsh's recommendations would substitute for the postmodernism's injunctions about examining marketing presuppositions. However, it would not perhaps provide the shakeup to our thinking that postmodernism provides even after we have separated the wheat from the chaff.

Conclusion

It is seldom the case that an intellectual movement that has attracted so large a following will have nothing to recommend it as it would fail to resonate with the audience as worthy of attention. Postmodernism's marketing appeals are (a) it offers a rationale for the disturbing lack of certainty that characterizes most disciplines; (b) it seemingly coheres with recent claims made by various philosophers or historians of science; (c) it is confidently asserted by clever scholars such as Derrida; (d) the set of doctrines constituting

postmodernism offers no quick way of telling whether they are true or not and, in any case, such inquiries are considered illegitimate; (e) it is emotionally appealing in its attack on the oppressive authority and dogmatism of so-called experts in various fields; (f) there is a recognition in marketing, for example, that scholars are too obsessed with over-intellectualizing buyer behavior with its focus on normative models of rationality and neglecting the role of emotion, imagery, and fantasy in everyone's life.

Flax (1990) regards the most important contribution of postmodernism as being its undermining of the "faulty" ideas about "self, knowledge, and power still prevalent in the contemporary West."[86] But perhaps postmodernism's lasting contribution lies, like all oppositional movements, in making defenders of current orthodoxy review and justify their belief claims. The result can only be less dogmatism, more modesty, and a rejection of any one-best-way to valid knowledge. On the other hand, extreme versions of postmodernism fail to resonate as having a credible agenda for adoption and are easy to dismiss. While postmodernism may have some cache on campus, it lacks any sort of standing in the world outside, being simply considered an academic fad. This is a pity if the good then gets buried with the bad. While the French version of postmodernism is in danger of fade-out as a philosophy through self-inflicted wounds, it has done much to shake academic complacency in its search for 'truth' and has made a contribution to the history of disciplines and institutions.

What we find interesting is how much of postmodernism has been borrowed from Nietzsche (Trigg, 1999).[87] It was Nietzsche who (i) more than anyone else denied the very possibility of human rationality as generally understood, (ii) pushed the view of the Greek philosopher Heraclitus (*c.*540–475 BC) that the universe was in a constant state of flux or change so that, from one moment to the next, things are changing ("You cannot step into the same river twice"), (iii) chose to view the world as a 'text' open to many different interpretations, (iv) said that there were no facts, only interpretations, (v) that truth was an illusion, (vi) stated that everything is fiction and invention and nothing is real with no reality underlying appearances, (vii) said that the "will to power" was key to all social life, (viii) said that man as a species is not progressing, (ix) stated that we are on a treadmill going nowhere. The Heraclitus claim that the universe is in a constant state of flux or change was one basis of the claim by postmodernists (and before them Plato's Cratylus) that reality is unknowable since things do no keep still, long enough to be described in a way that has a fixed meaning. As a consequence language has no fixed meanings so reliable and accurate information about the world is not feasible. Nietzsche, like the postmodernists, takes it for granted that we will accept these claims while denying that rationality would come into it!

We repeat that the postmodernism as described is that which is in the main underwritten by the major figures in postmodernism. But often in marketing postmodernists simply mean that they are post-*positivist* in orientation in that they reject the positivist hallmarks of mainstream

psychology, namely, reductionism, focus on measurement, determinism, and the autonomous individual. They instead put a great deal of emphasis on the human search for the higher meaning of things and the need for alternative perspectives. Thus Vitiz (1996) views the hallmark of postmodern psychology as being the human search for meaning.[88] 'The search for the "*meaning* of things" is what, he claims, really distinguishes the human sciences from the natural sciences. All experience has meaning or significance for people because it is in experience that people find order, aesthetics, morality, and values that guide purposive behavior tied to what people find meaningful. Traditional psychology ignores the notion of 'meaning' and the view that people act towards things on the basis of the meanings these things have for them.

Part of the appeal of the postmodernism in marketing is its critique of overly analytic, rational-choice-based notions of consumer decision-making and for positivist methods of investigation which are deaf to all nuance, and present consumers as something they definitely are not, that is, highly rational and tidy-minded. Such analytic methods and related theories postmodernists term 'modernist'.

Critics such as Thompson and Troester (2002) have attacked a textual reductivist approach which is insensible to "subtle tradeoffs, interplays and preferences," ignoring cultural contextualization and semantic constructs.[89] The defenders of these positivist methods seem to assume the existence of some kind of primordial truth, and a cognitive order which is rigid, self-organized with hierarchical preferences: "the Rokeachian approach epitomizes the valorized, modernist sense of reductionism: paring down cultural complexity to a parsimonious set of essential psychological dimensions" (Thompson and Troester, 2002). They add that "In all these cases, culturally constructed and contextually nuanced meanings are reified as abstract psychological universals.... The driving research agenda is to measure, aggregate, and classify consumers on the basis of their rank orderings."

Similarly, Arnould and Thompson (2005) make a plea for the significance of context-for the experiential, social, and cultural dimensions of consumption.[90] This we would endorse. There are no universal, non-trivial 'laws' in the behavioral sciences simply because contexts vary so widely. Clearly the market mediates our culture today, it arbiters meaning and material resources, and a critique of simplistic methods – 'rational' or 'modernist' that essentially caricatures complex social phenomena – is a necessary corrective: "Consumer culture theory focuses on the experiential and socio-cultural dimensions of consumption that are not plainly accessible through experiments, surveys or database modeling..., including such issues as product symbolism, ritual practices..." (Arnould and Thompson, 2005).[91] The authors think that the real world for any consumer "is neither unified, monolithic, nor transparently rational." We agree.

Some ('liberatory') postmodernist critics go much further than this and deny any legitimacy at all to modernist (i.e. quantitative empiricism and its

methodological adjuncts) investigatory processes. These critics seem to have no concept of methodological pluralism given there are many valid questions and assertions about any given problem or situation tied to different methodologies. While multiple interpretations are stressed, this notion, as articulated by for example Firat and Venkatesh (1995), eschews the idea that some interpretations are more valid than others.[92] They would elevate literary narratives alongside science, and, at their most extreme, claim an equivalency between science and 'feeling'. A multi-tool approach, legitimated by the postmodern order, can too easily morph into a kind of universal subjectivity calling either explicitly or implicitly for the rejection of all empiricism.

New methodologies, ethnographic for example, have arisen in consumer research to give voice to postmodern ideology. There is a new stress on the self-articulated narrative, with interpretation via hermeneutical processes: "accordingly, we propose that consumer value systems are articulated (and revealed to researchers) through stories that individuals tell about their consumption experiences" (Thompson and Troester, 2002).

Viktor Frankl (1978), a pioneer in focusing on meaning, formed his views on the importance of "meaning" through his experiences in German concentration camps in World War II.[93] His "logotherapy" literally means "therapy through meaning" is the reverse of traditional psychotherapy which he characterizes as "meaning through therapy." The Freudian 'pleasure principle' is replaced by the more emotionally motivating principle of the 'will-to-meaning' with frustration of this 'will-to-meaning' giving rise to emotion and neurosis. What is claimed is that, of all our concerns, the most important is the search for life's meaning (making sense of and determining the significance of life and the events in our life). Frankl claimed that those concentration camp inmates who survived were those who had found meaning in life and in their suffering. This search for meaning for Frankl is the major motivator with the most emotional (energizing) basis. It explains the search for spiritual and religious enlightenment, and at times the attachment to cults, creeds, nationalism, tribalism, and political ideologies.

Jerome Bruner (1990), one of the pioneers of cognitive psychology, argues that the cognitive revolution in psychology started as an all-out effort to establish "meaning" as the central concept of psychology but that early on it became seduced by the metaphor of the mind as a computer.[94] Nonetheless, the search for 'meaning' is central to many social science approaches. *Ethnomethodology* studies the 'folk methods' used by people in everyday life to give meaning to the roles they and others play in life and in the institutions that surround them. In *symbolic interactionism* (the study of the process by which people in interaction come to interpret the situation) it is argued that the meaning of a social situation emerges from the social interaction itself as captured through the interpretive process. *Ethogeny* also focuses on meaning specifically, on how action is made meaningful by those who carry out the action and those who observe the action being carried out. In cultural

anthropology, too, there are those like Geertz (1984) who focus on symbols and how they function to mediate meaning.[95]

If the assertions of French postmodernism as described here are becoming less and less fashionable, this is not true of the move away from positivism to something like the focus on meaning and the adoption of perspectivism. This movement is strengthening and it is something we would applaud, providing it is just considered an additional way of doing research in consumer behavior.

We argued at the beginning of this section on postmodernism that we cannot come away from grappling with the assertions of postmodernism without some modification of our views. Howard Gardner (2004) words it well when he says that, though he rejects postmodernism, he has not been unaffected in that he is (a) less prone to make definitive statements about what is right or wrong; (b) more likely to acknowledge the influence of stance, power, and trendiness; (c) more alert to potential contradictions in texts; (d) even allows there can be no definitive truth though he totally defends the striving for truth, beauty, morality, and progress.[96]

Eaglestone (2006) regards postmodernism as actually a split from the traditional ways of thinking in being a reaction to the "corruption" of reason and "dark side" of the Enlightenment.[97] In the book he links postmodernism to the Holocaust by showing that many of the metahistorical issues brought up and described by postmodernists emanate from thinking about the Holocaust. This is an unusual thesis that nonetheless is ably defended.

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