Counteracting America's Value Orientation to Sport:
A Perspective for the 21st Century

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Introduction

The term "*modernism*" is used to describe cultural movements in today's world that were caused by onrushing science, technology, and economic globalization. It is said to have started in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Conversely, *postmodernism*, as variously defined, can be described loosely as an effort by some intelligent and possibly wise people to react against what is happening to this *modern* world as it "races headlong" toward an indeterminate future.

It can be argued reasonably that America's thrust is modernistic to the nth degree. To the extent that this is true, I am arguing here conversely that Canada–and the rest of the world–should work to counteract America's value orientation as the world moves on into the 21st century. I believe that this can--and should done--by adopting a position that might be called "moderate" postmodernism.

Granted that it will be most difficult for the Western world to consistently exhibit a different "thrust" than America. Nevertheless I believe that now is the time for the West to create a society characterized by the better elements of what has been termed postmodernism. In fact, I feel that the entire world will be *forced* to grapple with the basic thrust of modernism in the 21st century if they hope to avoid the "twilight" that is descending on "American culture" (Berman, 2000). You, the reader, may well question this stark statement. However, bear with me, and let us begin.

What is postmodernism? While most philosophers have been "elsewhere engaged" for the past 50 plus years, what has been called postmodernism, and what I believe is poorly defined, has gradually become a substantive factor in broader intellectual circles. I freely admit to have been grumbling about the uncertain character of the term "postmodern" for decades. I say this because somehow it too has been used badly as have other philosophic terms such as existentialism, pragmatism, idealism, realism, etc. as they emerged as common parlance.

In this ongoing process, postmodernism was often used by a minority to challenge prevailing knowledge, and considerably less by the few truly seeking to analyze what was the intent of those who coined the term originally. For example, I am personally not suggesting, as some have, that scientific evidence and empirical reasoning are to be taken with a grain of salt based on someone's subjective reality. Further, if anything is worth saying, I believe it should be said as carefully and understandably as possible. Accordingly, the terms used must be defined, at least tentatively. Otherwise one can't help but think that the speaker (or writer) is either deceitful, a confused person, or has an axe to grind.

If nothing in the world is absolute, and one value is as good as another in a world increasingly threatened with collapse and impending doom, as some say postmodernists claim, then one idea is possibly as good as another in any search to cope with the planet's myriad problems. This caricature of a postmodern world, as one in which we can avoid dealing with the harsh realities facing humankind, is hardly what any rational person

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might suggest. How can humankind choose to avoid (1) looming environmental disaster, (2) ongoing war because of daily terrorist threats, and (3) hordes of displaced, starving people, many of whom are now victims of conflicts within troubled cultures? Further, as we still occasionally hear said, what rational being would argue that one idea is really as good as another?

What then is humankind to do in the face of the present confusion and often conflicted assertions about postmodernism from several quarters that have been bandied about? First, I think we need to consider the world situation as carefully as we possibly can. Perhaps this will provide us with a snapshot of the milieu where we can at least see the need for a changing (or changed) perspective that would cause humankind to abandon the eventual, destructive elements of modernism that threaten us. An initial look at some of the developments of the second half of the twentieth century may provide a perspective from which to judge the situation.

Historical Perspective on the "World Situation"

In this search for historical perspective on world society today, we need to keep in mind the significant developments of the decades immediately preceding the turn of the 21st century. For example, Naisbitt (1982) outlined the "ten new directions that are transforming our lives." Then his wife and he suggested the "megatrends" they saw insofar as women's evolving role in the societal structure (Aburdene & Naisbitt, 1992). Here I am referring to:
– the concepts of the information society and Internet,
– "high tech/high touch",
– the shift to world economy,
– the need to shift to long-term thinking in regard to ecology,
– the move toward organizational decentralization,
– the trend toward self-help,
– the ongoing discussion of the wisdom of participatory democracy as opposed to representative democracy,
– a shift toward networking,
– a reconsideration of the "north-south" orientation, and

– the viewing of decisions as "multiple option" instead of "either/or".

Add to this the ever-increasing, lifelong involvement of women in the workplace, politics, sports, organized religion, and social activism, and we begin to understand that a new world order has descended upon us as we begin the 21st century.

Moving ahead in time slightly past the presentation of Naisbitt's first set of *Megatrends*, a second list of 10 issues facing political leaders was highlighted in the *Utne Reader*. It was titled "Ten events that shook the world between 1984 and 1994" (1994, pp. 58–74). Consider the following:
– the fall of communism and the continuing rise of nationalism,
– the environmental crisis and the Green movement,
– the AIDS epidemic and the "gay response,"
– continuing wars (29 in 1993) and the peace movement,
– the gender war,
– religion and racial tension,
– the concept of "West meets East" and resultant implications,
– the "Baby Boomers" came of age and "Generation X" has started to worry and complain because of declining expectation levels,
– the whole idea of globalism and international markets, and
– the computer revolution and the specter of the Internet.

It is true that the world's "economic manageability"--or adaptability to cope with such change--may have been helped by its division into three major trading blocs: (1) the Pacific Rim dominated by Japan [now by China as well], (2) the European Community very heavily influenced by Germany, and (3) North America dominated by the United States of America. While this appears to be true to some observers, interestingly perhaps something even more fundamental has occurred. Succinctly put, world politics seems to be "entering a new phase in which the fundamental source of conflict will be neither ideological nor economic." In the place of these, Samuel P. Huntington, of Harvard's Institute for Strategic Studies, asserted that now

the major conflicts in the world would be clashes between different groups of civilizations espousing fundamentally different cultures.

These clashes represent a distinct shift away from viewing the world as being composed of "first, second, and third worlds" as was the case during the Cold War. Thus, Huntington is arguing that in the 21st century the world will return to a pattern of development evident several hundred years ago in which civilizations will actually rise and fall. (Interestingly, this is exactly what the late Arnold Toynbee in his now famous theory of history development stated. However, to confuse the situation even more, most recently we have been warned by scholars about the increasing number of clashes within civilizations!).

Internationally, after the dissolution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (the USSR), Russia and the remaining communist regimes have been severely challenged as they sought to convert to more of a capitalistic economic system. Additionally, a number of other multinational countries are regularly showing signs of potential breakups. Further, the evidence points to the strong possibility that the developing nations are becoming ever poorer and more destitute with burgeoning populations resulting in widespread starvation caused by both social and ecological factors.

Further, Western Europe is facing a demographic time bomb even more than the United States because of the influx of refugees from African and Islamic countries, not to mention refugees from countries of the former Soviet Union. It is evident that the European Community is inclined to appease Islam's demands. However, the multinational nature of the European Community will tend to bring on economic protectionism to insulate its economy against the rising costs of prevailing socialist legislation.

Still further, there is evidence that Radical Islam, possibly along with Communist China, is becoming increasingly aggressive toward the Western culture of Europe and North America. At present, Islam gives evidence of replacing Marxism as the world's main ideology of confrontation. For example, Islam is dedicated to regaining control of Jerusalem and to force Israel to give up control of land occupied earlier to provide a buffer zone against Arab aggressors. Also, China has been arming certain Arab nations, but how can the West be critical in this regard when we recall that the U.S.A. has also armed selected countries in the past [and present?] when such support was deemed in its interest?).

As Hong Kong, despite its ongoing protestations, is gradually absorbed into Communist China, further political problems seem inevitable in the Far East as well. Although North Korea is facing agricultural problems, there is the possibility (probability?) of the building of nuclear bombs there. Further, there is the ever-present fear worldwide that Iran, other smaller nations, and terrorists will somehow get nuclear weapons too. A growing Japanese assertiveness in Asian and world affairs also seems inevitable because of its typically very strong financial position. Yet the flow of foreign capital from Japan into North America has slowed down. This is probably because Japan has been confronted with its own financial crisis caused by inflated real estate and market values. Also, there would obviously be a strong reaction to any fall in living standards in this tightly knit society. Interestingly, further, the famed Japanese work ethic has become somewhat tarnished by the growing attraction of leisure opportunities.

The situation in Africa has become increasingly grim. Countries south of the Sahara Desert--that is, the dividing line between Black Africa and the Arab world--have experienced extremely bad economic performance in the past two decades. This social influence has brought to a halt much of the continental effort leading to political liberalization while at the same time exacerbating traditional ethnic rivalries. This economic problem has accordingly forced governmental cutbacks in many of the countries because of the pressures brought to bear by the financial institutions of the Western world that have been underwriting much of the development that had taken place. The poor are therefore getting poorer, and health and education standards have in many instances deteriorated even lower than they were previously. At this point one wonders how there

ever was thought about the average family ever living "the good life".

America's Position in the 21st Century

Reviewing America's position in the 21st century may help us to get to the heart of the matter about where the world is heading. For example, we could argue that North Americans do not fully comprehend that their unique position in the history of the world's development will in all probability change radically for the worse in the 21st century. Actually, of course, the years ahead are really going to be difficult ones for all of the world's citizens. However, it does appear that the United States is currently setting itself up "big time" for all kinds of societal difficulties. As the one major nuclear power, Uncle Sam has taken on the ongoing, overriding problem of maintaining large-scale peace. At the turn of the 20th century Teddy Roosevelt, while "speaking softly," nevertheless had his "big stick." The George ("W") Bush administration at the beginning of the 21st century had its "big stick", also, but it hasn't given a minute's thought about "speaking softly." The president actually claimed that America's assertive actions are "under God" and are designed for the good of all humanity. This has caused various countries, both large and small, to speak out about many perceive as a bullying posture. Some of these countries may or may not have nuclear arms capability already. That is what is so worrisome.

America, despite all of its proclaimed good intentions, is finding that history is going against it in several ways. This means that previous optimism may need to be tempered to shake politicians loose from delusions, some of which persist despite what seems to be commonsense logic. For example, it is troublesome that despite the presence of the United Nations, the United States has persisted in positioning itself as the world superpower. Such posturing and aggression, often by unilateral action with the hoped-for, belated sanction of the United Nations, has resulted in the two recent United States-led wars in the Middle East and other incursion into Somalia for very different reasons. There are also other similar situations on the recent horizon (e.g., Afghanistan, the former Yugoslavia, Rwanda, Sudan, and Haiti, respectively). I haven't even mentioned the "Vietnam disaster" of the 1960s. And--let's face it!--who knows what the Central Intelligence Agency has been doing lately to make the world safe for American-style democracy? Cuba first and now look out Venezuela!

There may be reason–post-George "W" in the Obama era°–that is, to expect selected U.S. cutbacks brought on by today's excessive world involvement and enormous debt. Of course, any such retrenchment would inevitably lead to a decline in the economic and military influence of the United States. But who can argue logically that the present uneasy balance of power is a healthy situation looking to the future? More than a generation ago, Norman Cousins sounded just the right note when he wrote: "the most important factor in the complex equation of the future is the way the human mind responds to crisis." The world culture as we know it today simply must respond adequately and peacefully to the many challenges with which it is being confronted. The societies and nations must individually and collectively respond positively, intelligently, and strongly if humanity as we have known it is to survive.

Additionally, problems and concerns of varying magnitude abound. It seems inevitable that all of the world will be having increasingly severe ecological problems, not to mention the ebbs and flows of an energy crisis. Generally, also, there is a worldwide nutritional problem, and an ongoing situation where the rising expectations of the underdeveloped nations, including their staggering debt, will have to be met somehow. These are just a few of the major concerns looming on the horizon. And, wait a minute, now we find that America has spent so much more "straightening out" the "enemy" that its debt has reached staggering proportions.

In his highly insightful analysis, *The twilight of American culture* (2000), Morris Berman explains that historically four factors are present when a civilization is threatened with collapse:
(1) Accelerating social and economic inequality,
(2) Declining marginal returns with regard to investments in organizational solutions to socioeconomic problems,

(3) Rapidly dropping levels of literacy, critical understanding, and general intellectual awareness, and

(4) Spiritual death--that is, Spengler's classicism: the emptying out of cultural content and the freezing (or repackaging) of it in formulas-kitsch, in short. (p. 19).

He then states that all of these factors are increasingly present on the American scene. Question: how did America get itself into this presenting highly precarious situation in regard to the daily lives of its citizens?

The Impact of Negative Social Forces Has Increased

Keeping our focus on humankind's search for "the good life" in the 21st century, in North America we are finding that the human recreational experience will have to be earned typically within a society whose very structure has been modified. For example, 1/ the concept of the traditional family structure has been strongly challenged by a variety of social forces (e.g., economics, divorce rate); 2/ many single people are finding that they must work longer hours; and 3/ many families need more than one breadwinner just to make ends meet. Also, the idea of a steady surplus economy may have vanished in the presence of a burgeoning budgetary deficit. What nonessentials do we cut from the debt-overwhelmed budget at a time like this to bring back what might be called fiscal sanity?

Additionally, many of the same problems of megalopolis living described back in the 1960s still prevail and are even increasing (e.g., declining infrastructure, crime rates in multiethnic populated centers, transportation gridlocks, overcrowd-ed school classrooms). Thinking back to 1967, Prime Minister Lester Pearson asked Canadians to improve "the quality of Canadian life" as Canada celebrated her 100th anniversary as a confederation. Interestingly, still today, despite all of Canada's current identity problems, some pride can be taken in the fact that Canada has on occasion been proclaimed as the best place on earth to live. Nevertheless, we can't escape the fact that the work week is not getting shorter and shorter, and that the 1960s' prediction about achieving four different types of

leisure class still seems a distant dream for the large majority of people (Michael).

Further, the situation has developed in such a way that the presently maturing generation is finding 1/ that fewer good-paying jobs are available and 2/ that the average annual income is declining (especially if we keep a steadily rising cost of living in mind). What caused this to happen is not a simple question to answer. For one thing, despite the rosy picture envisioned a generation ago--one in which we were supposedly entering a new stage for humankind--we are unable today to cope adequately with the multitude of problems that have developed. This situation is true whether inner city, suburbia, exurbia, or small-town living is concerned. Transportation jams and gridlock, for example, are occurring daily as public transportation struggles to meet rising demand for economical transport within the framework of developing megalopolises.

Certainly, megalopolis living trends have not abated and will probably not do so in the predictable future. More and more families, where that unit is still present, need two breadwinners just to survive. Interest rates, although minor cuts are made when economic slowdowns occur, have been reasonable. Yet, they have been inching higher. A booming real estate market discourages many people from home ownership. Pollution of air and water continues despite efforts of many to change the present course of development. High-wage industries seem to be "heading south" in search of places where lower wages can be paid. Also, all sorts of crime are still present in our society, a goodly portion of it seemingly brought about by unemployment, drug-taking, and rising debt at all levels from the individual to the federal government.

The continuing presence of youth crime is especially disturbing. (This is especially true when homegrown youth turn to terrorism!) In this respect, it is fortunate in North America that municipal, private-agency, and public recreation has received continuing financial support from the increasingly burdened taxpayer. Even here, however, there has been a definite trend toward user fees for many services thereby affecting people's ability to get involved. Life goes on,

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however, but the question arises in ongoing discussions as to what character we seek for people within a burgeoning population.

What Character Do We Seek for People?

Functioning in a world that is steadily becoming a "Global Village," or a "flat earth" as described by Thomas Friedman, we need to think more seriously than ever before about the character and traits which we should seek to develop in people. Not even mentioning the Third World, people in what we call "developed nations" continue to lead or strive for the proverbial good life. To attain this state, children and young people need to develop the right attitudes (psychologically speaking) toward education, work, use of leisure, participation in government, various types of consumption, and concern for world stability and peace. If we truly desire "the good life," we somehow have to provide an increased level of education for the creative and constructive use of leisure to a greater percentage of the population. As matters stand, there doesn't seem to be much impetus in the direction of achieving this balance as a significant part of ongoing general education. We are not ready for a society where education for leisure has a unique role to play on into the indeterminate future? How might such a development affect the character of our young people?

What are called the "Old World countries" all seem to have a "character"; it is almost something that they take for granted. However, it is questionable whether there is anything that can be called a character in North America (i.e., in the United States? In Europe? in Canada?). Americans were thought earlier to be heterogeneous and individualistic as a people, as opposed to Canadians. But the Canadian culture--whatever that may be today! --has moved toward multiculturalism quite significantly in the past two decades. Of course, Canada was founded by two distinct cultures, the English and the French. In addition to working out a continuing, reasonably happy relationship between these two cultures, it is now a question because of an aggressive "multicultural approach" of assimilating--as Canadians (!)--

people arriving from many different lands. And let's not forget the claims of "first nations" whose 99 entities in British Columbia along claim more territory than exists!

Shortly after the middle of the twentieth century, Commager (1966), the noted historian, enumerated what he believed were some common denominators in American (i.e., U.S.) character. These, he said, were (1) carelessness; (2) openhandedness, generosity, and hospitality; (3) self-indulgence; (4) sentimentality, and even romanticism; (5) gregariousness; (6) materialism; (7) confidence and self-confidence; (8) complacency, bordering occasionally on arrogance; (9) cultivation of the competitive spirit; (10) indifference to, and exasperation with laws, rules, and regulations; (11) equalitarianism; and (12) resourcefulness (pp. 246–254).

What about Canadian character as opposed to what Commager stated above for America? (Could there be such a thing as European character?) Although completed a quarter of a century ago, Lipset (1973) carried out a perceptive comparison between the two countries that has probably not changed significantly in the interim. He reported that these two countries probably resemble each other more than any other two in the world. Nevertheless, he asserted that there seemed to be a rather "consistent pattern of differences between them" (p. 4). He found that certain "special differences" did exist and may be singled out as follows:

Varying origins in their political systems and national identities, varying religious traditions, and varying frontier experiences. In general terms, the value orientations of Canada stem from a counterrevolutionary past, a need to differentiate itself from the United States, the influence of Monarchical institutions, a dominant Anglican religious tradition, and a less individualistic and more governmentally controlled expansion of the Canadian than of the American frontier (p. 5).

Seymour Lipset's findings tended to sharpen the focus on opinions commonly held earlier that, even though there is considerable sharing of values, they are held more tentatively in Canada. Also, he believed that Canada had

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consistently settled on "the middle ground" between positions arrived at in the United States and England. However, Lipset argued that, although the twin values of equalitarianism and achievement have been paramount in American life--but somewhat less important in Canada--there was now consistent movement in this direction in Canada as well (p. 6). Keeping national aims, value orientations, and character traits in mind as being highly important, of course, as well all of the material progress that has been made by a segment of the population, we are nevertheless forced to ask ourselves if we in Canada are "on the right track heading in the right direction?"

What Happened to the Original Enlightenment Ideal?

The achievement of "the good life" for a majority of citizens in the developed nations, a good life that involves a creative and constructive use of leisure as a key part of general education, necessarily implies that a certain type of progress has been made in society. However, we should understand that the chief criterion of progress has undergone a subtle but decisive change since the founding of the United States republic in North America. This development has had a definite influence on Canada and Mexico as well. Such change has been at once a cause and a reflection of the current disenchantment with technology. Recall that the late 18th century was a time of political revolution when monarchies and aristocracies, and that the ecclesiastical structure were being challenged on a number of fronts in the Western world. Also, the factory system was undergoing significant change at that time.

As Leo Marx (1990, p. 5) reported such industrial development with its greatly improved machinery "coincided with the formulation and diffusion of the modern Enlightenment idea of history as a record of progress…" He explained further that this: "new scientific knowledge and accompanying technological power was expected to make possible a comprehensive improvement in all of the conditions of life--social, political, moral, and intellectual as well as material." This idea did indeed slowly take hold and eventually "became the fulcrum of the dominant American world view" (p. 5). By 1850, however, with the rapid growth of the United States especially, the idea of progress was already being dissociated from the Enlightenment vision of political and social liberation.

By the turn of the twentieth century, "the technocratic idea of progress [had become] a belief in the sufficiency of scientific and technological innovation as the basis for general progress" (Leo Marx, p. 9). This came to mean that if scientific-based technologies were permitted to develop in an unconstrained manner, there would be an automatic improvement in all other aspects of life! What happened--because this theory became coupled with onrushing, unbridled capitalism--was that the ideal envisioned by Thomas Jefferson in the United States has been turned upside down. Instead of social progress being guided by such values as justice, freedom, and self-fulfillment for all people, rich or poor, these goals of vital interest in a democracy were subjugated to a burgeoning society dominated by supposedly more important instrumental values (i.e., useful or practical ones for advancing a capitalistic system).

Have conditions improved? The answer to this question is obvious. The fundamental question still today is, "which type of values will win out in the long run?" In North America, for example, a developing concept of cultural relativism was being discredited as the 1990s witnessed a sharp clash between (1) those who uphold so-called Western cultural values and (2) those who by their presence are dividing the West along a multitude of ethnic and racial lines. This is occasioning strong efforts to promote "fundamentalist" religions and sects--either those present historically or those recently imported. These numerous religions, and accompanying sects, are characterized typically by decisive right/wrong morality. It is just this sort of "progress" that has led concerned people to inquire where we in the developed world are heading. What kind of a future is "out there" for humankind if the world continues in the same direction it is presently heading? We don't know for certain, of course, but a number of different scenarios can be envisioned depending on

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humanity's response to the present crisis of a society characterized by modernism.

Future Societal Scenarios (Anderson)

In this adventure of civilization, Walter Truett Anderson, then– president of the American Division of the World Academy of Art and Science, postulates four different scenarios for the future of earthlings. In *The future of the self: Inventing the postmodern person* (1997), Anderson argues convincingly that current trends are adding up to an early 21st-century identity crisis for humankind. The creation of the present "modern self," he explains, began with Plato, Aristotle, and with the rights of humans in Roman legal codes.

Anderson argues that the developing conception of self bogged down in the Middle Ages, but fortunately was resurrected in the Renaissance Period of the second half of The Middle Ages. Since then the human "self" has been advancing like a "house afire" as the Western world has gone through an almost unbelievable transformation. Without resorting to historical detail, I will say only that scientists like Galileo and Copernicus influenced philosophers such as Descartes and Locke to foresee a world in which the self was invested with human rights.

Anderson's "One World, Many Universes" version is prophesied as the most likely to occur. This is a scenario characterized by (1) high economic growth, (2) steadily increasing technological progress, and (3) globalization combined with high psychological development. Such psychological maturity, he predicts, will be possible for a certain segment of the world's population because "active life spans will be gradually lengthened through various advances in health maintenance and medicine" (pp. 251-253). (This scenario may seem desirable, of course, to people who are coping reasonably well at present).

However, it appears that a problem has developed at the beginning of this new century with this dream of individual achievement of inalienable rights and privileges. The modern self envisioned by Descartes--a rational, integrated self that Anderson likens to Captain Kirk at the command post of (the original Starship Enterprise--is having an identity crisis. The

image of this bold leader (he or she!) taking us fearlessly into the great unknown has begun to fade as alternate scenarios for the future of life on Earth are envisioned.

For example, John Bogle of Vanguard, in his *The Battle for the Soul of Capitalism* (2007) argues that what he terms "global capitalism" is destroying the already uneasy balance between democracy as a political system and capitalism as an economic system. In a world where globalization and economic "progress" seemingly must be rejected because of catastrophic environmental concerns or "demands," the bold-future image could well "be replaced by a postmodern self; decentered, multidimensional, and changeable" (p. 50).

Captain Kirk, or "George W," as he "boldly went where no man has gone before"–this time to rid the world of terrorists)–faced a second crucial change. Now, as the Obama American Government seeks to shape the world of the 21st century, based on Anderson's analysis, there is another force–the systemic-change force mentioned above–that is shaping the future. This all-powerful force may well exceed the Earth's ability to cope with what happens. As gratifying as such factors as "globalization along with economic growth" and "psychological development" may seem to the folks in Anderson's "One-World, Many Universes" scenario, there is a flip side to this prognosis. This image, Anderson identifies, as "The Dysfunctional Family" scenario. It turns out that all of the "benefits" of so-called progress are highly expensive and available now only to relatively few of the six billion plus people on earth. Anderson foresees this scenario as "a world of modern people relatively happily doing their thing--modern people still obsessed with progress, economic gain, and organizational bigness--along with varieties of postmodern people being trampled and getting angry" [italics added] (p. 51). And, I might add further, as people get angrier, present-day terrorism in North America could seem like child's play.

What Kind of A World Do You Want for Your Descendents?

What I am really asking here is whether you, the reader of these words, is cognizant of,

and approves of, the situation as it is developing today. Are you (and I too!) simply "going along with the crowd" while taking the path of least resistance? Can we do anything to improve the situation by implementing an approach that could help to make the situation more beneficent and wholesome in perspective? What I am recommending is that the time is ripe for a country like Canada–not to mention the European Union–to distinguish itself more aggressively as being on a "different path" than the United States of America. To do this, however, individually and collectively, we would need to determine what sort of a world we (and our descendants) should be living in.

If you consider yourself an environmentalist, for example, the future undoubtedly looks bleak to you. What can we so to counter the strong business orientation of society (i.e., being swept along with the "onward and upward" economic and technologic growth of American modernism and capitalism)? Such is most certainly not the answer to all of our developing problems and issues. We should see ourselves increasingly as "New Agers" working to help the rest of the Western world as it works to forge its own identity. I grant you, however, some sort of mass, non-religious "spiritual" transformation would have to take place for this to become a reality.

Let me offer one example based on my personal experience where I think we can all make a good beginning in this respect. (Some who read this may wish to hang me in effigy [or literally!] for this assertion). Nevertheless I believe that Canada should strive to hold back the negative influences of America's approach to overly commercial, competitive sport in both universities and the public sector. At present we are too often typically conforming blindly to a power structure in which sport is used largely by private enterprise for selfish purposes. The problem is this: opportunities for participation in all competitive sport--not just Olympic sport--moved historically from amateurism to semi-professionalism, and then on to full-blown professionalism.

The Olympic Movement, because of a variety of social pressures, followed suit in both ancient times and the present. When the International Olympic Committee gave that final push to the pendulum and openly admitted professional athletes to play in the Games, they may have pleased most of the spectators and all of the advertising and media representatives. But in so doing the floodgates were opened completely. The original ideals upon which the Games were reactivated were completely abandoned. This is what caused Sir Rees-Mogg in Britain, for example, to state that crass commercialism had won the day. This final abandonment of any semblance of what was the original Olympic ideal was the "straw that broke the camel's back." This ultimate decision regarding eligibility for participation has indeed been devastating to those people who earnestly believe that money and sport are like oil and water; they simply do not mix! Their response has been to abandon any further interest in, or support for, the entire Olympic Movement.

The question must, therefore be asked: "What should rampant professionalism in competitive sport at the Olympic Games mean to any given country out of the 200-plus nations involved?" This is not a simple question to answer responsibly. In this present brief statement, it should be made clear that the professed social values of a country should ultimately prevail--and that they will prevail in the final analysis. However, this ultimate determination will not take place overnight. The fundamental social values of a social system will eventually have a strong influence on the individual values held by most citizens in that country, also. If a country is moving toward the most important twin values of equalitarianism and achievement, for example, what implications does that have for competitive sport in that political entity under consideration? The following are some questions that should be asked before a strong continuing commitment is made to sponsor such involvement through governmental and/or private funding:

1. Can it be shown that involvement in competitive sport at one or the other of the three levels (i.e., amateur, semi-professional, professional) brings about desirable social values (i.e., more value than disvalue)?

2. Can it be shown that involvement in competitive sport at one or the other of the

three levels (i.e., amateur, semiprofessional, or professional) brings about desirable individual values of both an intrinsic and extrinsic nature (i.e., creates more value than disvalue)?

3. If the answer to Questions #1 and #2 immediately are both affirmative (i.e., that involvement in competitive sport at any or all of the three levels postulated [i.e., amateur, semi-professional, and professional sport] provides a sufficient amount of social and individual value to warrant such promotion),can sufficient funds be made available to support or permit this promotion at any or all of the three levels listed?

4. If funding to support participation in competitive sport at any or all of the three levels (amateur, semiprofessional, professional) is not available (or such participation is not deemed advisable), should priorities–as determined by the expressed will of the people–be established about the importance of each level to the country based on careful analysis of the potential social and individual values that may accrue to the society and its citizens from such competitive sport participation at one or more levels?

Further, as one aging person who encountered corruption and sleaze in the intercollegiate athletic structure of several major universities in the United States, I retreated to a Canadian university where the term "scholar-athlete" still implies roughly what it says. However, I now see problems developing on the Canadian inter-university sport scene as well. We have two choices before us. One choice is to do nothing about the "creeping semiprofessionalism" that is occurring. This would require no great effort, of course. We can simply go along with the prevailing ethos of a North American society that is using sport to help in the promotion of social, as opposed to moral, character traits. In the process, "business as usual" will be supported one way or the other. A postmodern approach, conversely, would be one where specific geographic regions in Canada (the east, the far west. Quebec, and the midwest) reverse the trend toward semi–professionalism that is steadily developing. The

pressures on university presidents and governing boards will increase steadily. Will they have wisdom and acumen to ward off this insidious possibility?

The reader can readily see where I am coming from with this discussion. I recommend strongly that we take a good look at what is implied when we challenge ourselves to consider what the deliberate creation of a postmodern world might do for an increasingly multiethnic Canada. Despite the return to a Conservative minority government, expanding the elements of postmodernism in Canada has a fighting chance to succeed. In the United States--forget it! Nevertheless, in its solid effort to become a unique, multicultural society, Canada may already be implementing what may be considered some of the better aspects of the concept of "postmodernism." For better or worse–and it may well be the latter–we are not so close to "the behemoth to the South" that we can't read the handwriting on the wall about what's happening "down there."

Can We Strengthen the Postmodern Influence?

My review of selected world, European, North American, regional, and local developments occurring in the final quarter of the 20th century may have created both positive and negative thoughts on your part. You might ask how this broadly based discussion relates to a plea for consideration of an increasingly postmodern social philosophy. My response to this question is "vigorous": "It doesn't" and yet "It does." It doesn't relate or "compute" to the large majority of those functioning in the starkly modern "North American" world. The affirmative answer--that it does--is correct if we listen to the voices of those in the substantive minority who are becoming increasingly restless with the obvious negatives of the modernism that has spread so rapidly in the modern world.

To help reverse this disturbing development, some wise scholars have recommended that the discipline of philosophy should have some connection to the world as it was described above. The late philosopher, Richard Rorty (1997), termed a so-called Neo-pragmatist, exhorted the presently "doomed

liberal Left" in North America to join the fray again. Their presumed shame should not be bolstered by a mistaken belief that only those who agree with the Marxist position that capitalism must be eradicated are "true Lefts." Rorty recommends that philosophy once again become characterized as a "search for wisdom," a search that seeks conscientiously and capably to answer the many pressing issues and problems looming before humankind worldwide.

While most philosophers were "elsewhere engaged," some within the fold considered what has been called postmodernism carefully. For example, in *Crossing the postmodern divide* by Albert Borgmann (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), it was refreshing to find such a clear assessment of the present situation. Time and again in discussions about postmodernism, I have encountered what I soon began to characterize as gobbledygook (i.e., planned obfuscation?). This effort by Borgmann was solid, down-to-earth, and comprehensible. However, in the final two pages, he veered to a Roman-Catholic position that that he calls postmodern realism as the answer to the plight caused by modernism. It is his right, of course, to state his personal opinion after describing the current political and social situation so accurately. However, if he could have brought himself to it, or if he had thought it possible, it might have been better if he had spelled out several alternative directions for humankind to go in the 21st century. (Maybe we should be thankful that he thought any one might be able to save it!)

With his argument that "postmodernism must become, for better or worse, something other than modernism," Borgmann explains that: [postmodernism] already exhibits two distinct tendencies: The first is to refine technology. Here postmodernism shares with modernists an unreserved allegiance to technology, but it differs from modernism in giving technology a hyper-fine and hyper-complex design. This tendency I call hyper-modernism. The alternative tendency is to outgrow technology as a way of life and to put it to the service of reality, of the things that command our respect and grace our life. This I call postmodern realism (p. 82).

At what point could we argue that the modern epoch or era has come to an end and that civilization is ready to put hyper-modernism aside and embrace Borgmann's postmodern realism--or any form of postmodernism for that matter? Can we hope to find agreement that this epoch is approaching closure because a substantive minority of the populace is challenging many of the fundamental beliefs of modernism? The "substantive minority" may not be large enough yet, but the reader may be ready to agree that indeed the world is moving into a new epoch as the proponents of postmodernism have been affirming over recent decades. Within such a milieu all professions would probably find great difficulty crossing this so-called, postmodern gap (chasm, divide, whatever you may wish to call it). Scholars argue convincingly that many in democracies, under girded by the various rights being propounded (e.g., individual freedom, privacy), have not yet come to believe that they have found a supportive "liberal consensus" within their respective societies.

My contention is that "post-modernists"--whether they recognize themselves as belonging to this group--now form a substantive minority that supports a more humanistic, pragmatic, liberal consensus in society. Yet they recognize that present-day society is going to have difficulty crossing any such postmodern divide. Many traditionalists in democratically oriented political systems may not like everything they see in front of them today, but as they look elsewhere they flinch even more. After reviewing where society has been, and where it is now, two more questions need to be answered. Where is society heading, and--most importantly--where should it be heading?

As despairing as one might be of society's direction today, the phenomenon of postmodernism--with its accompanying deconstructionist analytic technique affirming the idea that the universe is valueless with no absolute--brings one up short quickly. Take your choice: bleak pessimism or blind optimism. The former seems to be more dangerous to humankind's future that that of an idealistic future "under the sheltering arms of a Divine Father." Yet, some argue that Nietzsche's philosophy of

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being, knowledge, and morality supports the basic dichotomy espoused by the philosophy of being in the post-modernistic position. I can understand at once, therefore, why it meets with opposition by those whose thought has been supported by traditional theocentrism.

A better approach, I recommend, might be one of "positive meliorism" in which humankind is exhorted to "take it from here and do its best to improve the world situation." In the process we should necessarily inquire: "What happened to the "Enlightenment ideal"? This was supposed to be America's chief criterion of progress, but it has gradually but steadily undergone such a decisive change since the founding of the Republic. That change is at once a cause and a reflection of our current disenchantment with technology.

Post-modernists do indeed subscribe to a humanistic, anthropocentric belief as opposed to the traditional theocentric position. They would probably subscribe, therefore to what B. Berelson and G.A. Steiner in the mid-1960s postulated as a behavioral science image of man and woman. This view characterized the human as a creature continuously adapting reality to his or her own ends. Such thought undoubtedly challenges the authority of theological positions, dogmas, ideologies, and some scientific "infallibles".

A moderate post-modernist--holding a position I feel able to subscribe to once I am able to bring it all into focus--would at least listen to what the "authority" had written or said before criticizing or rejecting it. A fully committed post-modernist goes his or her own way by early, almost automatic, rejection of all tradition. Then this person presumably relies simply on a personal interpretation and subsequent diagnosis to muster the authority to challenge any or all icons or "lesser gods" extant in society.

Concluding Statement

In conclusion, it seems obvious that a *moderate* post-modernist would feel most comfortable seeking to achieve his or her personal, professional, and social/environmental goals through the stance that has been described. This position would be directly opposed to the traditional stifling position of, for example, "essentialist" theological realists or idealists. The world is changing. It has changed! These conflicting "world religions" are getting in the way of civilization's progress. The conflicts they cause could destroy humankind. A more pragmatic "value-is-that-which-is proven-through-experience" orientation that could emerge as one legacy of postmodernism would leave the future open-ended. That is the way it ought to be for the future on this "speck" called Earth in an infinite multiverse…

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