Postmodernism and Christian Theology (Part 1 Disc 2)

By Dallas Willard

Dallas Willard:

Those of us who are worked a little in the literature philosophy will know there are discussions of content, or cognitive content representational content, but now, just think of this or about this. All of our language and all of our conscious states are all or about something. This is a kind of selectivity, and you can just represented in this way think of this as consciousness, and now you're open to interpret that linguistically or not and this arrow that's representing the openness aboutness and then you have an object, and that object may be the text of the Gospel of John, or Hamlet, or may be the solar system, or it may be the physiology of sport, or the sociology of sport or something of that sort. So, this this general diagram here is what I'd like for you to hold before your consciousness for a moment now. You have thought or language, you have object and you have a selectivity between them, and we just use it all the time without thinking of course, but what postmodernism and modernism does in fact pre-modernism as well had versions of what this relationship is. Now sub issues are for example is this linguistic or not? Can you have consciousness without language? And a major, major issue in post-modern is precisely the issue. Use the language involved in this essentially. Now, we all know that in some way it is, minimally when you speak your language picks out things because of its association with consciousness. So babies, we've been recently just thrilled out of our socks by little granddaughter and watching her. She's six months old now, watching the child learn to see things and to reach for things and to pick them out and she doesn't have any language.
Now one move, which you want to be aware of if you're not already is that, many postmodernist would say, "oh yes she has a language" it's a mental language. So language itself becomes very sneaky, yeah. So if she has a language it isn't English or French or German. Some people use the word mental ease. See that's the idea that thought could only be in a linguistic form of some kind and therefore a priority consciousness is linguistic, but the postmodernist take on this now is that, whatever you say about this language, even if you say its metal ease, it has to be culturally formed. So for example, the baby, is inducted into the particular form of baby interaction that parents and grandparents around that child already had, and culture is bigger than the language and might be for many of the structuralist and post-structuralists. It is treated as a language because it is a code. So code becomes a code word for language. Code just means that there are elements which are handled according to certain rules, and these rules mean what comes after this, what comes next, what do you do when this comes up? So it may be, it would be said the baby for example that is left in isolation and is not interactive with another person eventually dies because, not just because of lack of food you could arrange something of that, but because a lack of interaction, it does not just take only form, which would be cultural. So you can see now that there's a major issue here and associated with this is the issue. Are you ever conscious of things as they are, independently of a consciousness? Now we have to dwell on that one because that is the single biggest issue in the modern, postmodernist, almost any thus you mention debate. Yes.

Yes, are we ever, or can we be conscious of objects as they are independently of our consciousness [inaudible].
I noticed when I put my statement about knowledge up here. I wanted to leave all of those questions open, but the. The position that drives postmodernism is that you cannot know objects as they are independently of their consciousness of your consciousness of them. Now then you have of the further point, your consciousness is socially formed, but for the moment we can just park that and leave that aside. Now this is on a continuum with the old story about when the tree falls in the forest. Does it make a sound if there's no one to hear it? Or the recent feminist one that I heard you may have heard it too. When a man walking through the forest makes a statement if it is. Is it false if there is no woman there to hear him? Is it still false?

Idea here is that your consciousness does something to something. Your consciousness does something to something that changes it and just to give you a phrase to hang that on that's what I call Midas touch epistemology. Midas touch epistemology and you'll remember King Midas when he touched anything it turned to gold and the idea here is that when consciousness touches something it changes it. There are many ways of working this the orthodox Kantian way is to say, that in order to know something, consciousness has to shape the sense matter into whatever this means, into an object. We can't see an apple unless your consciousness and in Kant’s case, this was a transcendental consciousness untouched by history had nothing to do with culture or language, but of course that's generally rejected and given a reinterpretation in postmodernism, but for Kant, your mind had to take in since data like red and round and sweet and smooth and so on and put those all together in some way to form a substance with an identity. And that idea, you may not give with the standard version of course in our time is a linguistic version, that to recognize something as an apple I have to have the concept of apple and the concept of apple is just the meaning of the word apple. So to see something as an apple that's that's the language that is crucial here we see something as, something as, and the
as-ing is where the transformation comes in. The as-ing you see it as you classify it. To classify it is to make it determinant that language is often used it's indeterminate before it becomes determinant or you look at a page what is it. Well you know. Fishes’ famous book, is there a text in the class. Nothing is a book, nothing is a text until you treat it in a certain way. And the famous hermeneutical circle comes out of the same idea; that you see something you take it as something and then having taking it as something you take it in a different way. And you go around in a circle and there's no end to the circle. So the idea that interpretations never ceased means that you never find out that perhaps stronger there isn't any sense to the idea of what something really is. And so various authors take this in different ways and if you had a chance to look at these readings you get that idea of continuous interpretation. Does language for that is there's no transcendental signified. That means you never manage to reach something in language or consciousness that is outside of the flow of language and consciousness.

Now that see that's a major point and let me return from what do you see how that would affect this arrow. See that, that would mean that this arrow whatever it reached was somehow created by the arrow itself and you may want to fancy that up in various ways, that's the basic idea. So that consciousness has an effect. I mean you can either take the route of saying just consciousness just produces it or you can say consciousness somehow contacts something, but then brings it within a kind of boundary of culture, language, all the old individualists would say the mind. So we had what was called the circle of ideas, the egocentric particular, the egocentric predicament is what it used to be called in philosophy. The egocentric predicament that is everything you know only is what it is in relationship to the self. Now the post-modernist route is not that, it is more like what I call the lingo centric particular predicament you can never conduct anything that isn't wrong within the language, but see the crucial idea here is that when
you start out looking at this you might think that the main division here is consciousness and
object, but you find that the division falls over here that whatever is outside is beyond the object.

So for example if you're reading, if you're doing Mike's work with New Testament text
you never can just access a text. Indeed if fish is right there is no such thing as a text that isn't
already interpreted. If you are doing speckled spectrograph analysis of stars, same sort of thing.
You're already you've already brought it in is already the word already gets overused in
postmodernism because what you the general idea is what you think you are arriving at you
already had. So now the real issue here for postmodernism and whatever alternatives is is
whether or not it is possible to escape the Midas touch. And that, we, this is the deepest
philosophical issue in the whole area and how you answer this will determine almost everything
else. Yvonne.

Yvonne:

I am confused, because it does not seem to me that my consciousness doesn’t [Inaudible]
apple.it changes apple, but it changes my perception of apple. Appel remains apple, whatever it
is within itself. My perception of apple is different, my perception of that and then maybe your
perception of that will be differently, but it’s just a matter of perception. We’re not actually
talking about changing anything about it, my thinking of that observation.

Dallas Willard:

Well I like that, I am with you, but there is that it is impossible to distinguish between the
object as you perceive it and the object as it is in itself, that you can never get to the object as it is
in itself because every time you try that you just get another as that belongs to you.

Yvonne:

Well I agree with that, it's just that
Dallas Willard:

Now be careful, be careful with that. I mean don't give too much away too fast. OK.