

Post Modernism: Philosophical and Historical Roots Part 3 Disc

2

By Dallas Willard

Student 1:

[Inaudible] and how they fit into a language prevalence, supper language.

Dallas Willard:

Well, all of those symbols can be used in communication. They also can be used for immediate aesthetic enjoyment. I myself would not equate those, but like any any sensible symbol they can be used as a symbol for communication. I used to have a, used. When I was Baylor University years ago, the guy who was a lovely man that ran the music department and he used he'd like to carry on how language. How music was a language and he meant something like, everyone reacts to it, but you know that really is what we get is a forced sense of language and in modern culture where language is so prevalent and privileged and so everything becomes language and a certain point. And I but I would want to say that aesthetic enjoyment is not tied necessarily to symbols. It can use symbols, Lord knows writing novels for example, also painting and other forms, even music can use. For example, Till Eulenspiegel's is a kind of symbol in a Strauss tone poem and my aesthetic enjoyment of that tone poem is based in part on my understanding of Till Eulenspiegel's as a symbol for the rebel who is trying to kick the slaps out of the establishment. He gets hung, but you know it's all good story. So I would just want to distinguish aesthetic appreciation in general from uses of symbols and communication. Now there's no doubt that much art does literally communicate. So I don't question that but I I would want to hold a distinction that.

Student 1:

[Inaudible]

Dallas Willard:

Yes. Well that's that's right. But I would also want to say possibly threatened one another. Right? For example, how much has Beethoven's Fifth Symphony suffered from its associations with victory and Winnie. Oh that sort of thing. Well my feeling is it's suffered a great deal to say the truth. So, there's an interplay of values there that I think would phenomenologically have to be proved very carefully with great respect for the differentiations in relations. But it's not something to be put aside. Obviously, communication is possible involving music and all forms. I think all of the all of the material forms that could be used in an artistic expression, dancing, for example, for a different kind of performance.

Well I think I'm just going to say very quickly is hermeneutics, critical theory, deconstruction are primary are the two most identifiable versions of postmodernism that we have today, given you a little bibliography on hermeneutical in your readings a little bit on deconstruction. Actually there are some in the hermeneutics volume on critical theory, a section on the Habermas. Just very quickly the main point about hermeneutics is that all knowledge is an unending process of interpretation. Hermeneutics, of course many of you know as something like the science of the principles of interpretive text and so on, but hermeneutics as a philosophy essentially the statement that everything you contemplate or deal with is a text, that it is interpreted, and you can lay down certain general principles of interpretation. Heidegger's famous hermeneutic circle, the playing of the whole against the part and part against the whole in ways that are extremely familiar, Virginia was mentioning picking up a poem, being asked "well what's the general form?" Well first of all you recognize the poem I guess, before you even start to the form, which would be the part in relation to the whole. Then you'd begin to break the form

down the parts and so and you get down to the particular words and all of that the structures would emerge and this would be in fact a sort of process which would probably be taken over in the following way that the interpretations that you would give of that poem would involve interpretations of interpretations that had previously been given on that and subsequent interpretations would probably take into account your interpretation and so forth and so on.

So you have the creation of an ongoing process now for Heidegger, Gadamer and really for Ricoeur understanding is the basic process of life. It is not just something cognate to it has to do with all of action and what you find in these writers are attempts to provide general context, general structures we should use the general structure for interpreting the process of understanding.

Critical Theory, I should say that hermeneutical is basically a hopeful bunch of people. Heidegger's a little less hopeful than the others Gadamer and Ricoeur are both quite hopeful, perhaps because both of them are Christians in a way that Heidegger couldn't manage. He had to manage it in a very curious way because he's been adopted [inaudible] and Heidegger have both been adopted by the Catholic Church and Catholic thinkers and now the biggest audience lies and both of them were believers, but you have to listen to all their qualifications. They're very hopeful. A critical theory is a, is a hermeneutics of skeptics of pessimism as it has been called. It's a hermeneutics of pessimism and it is a hermeneutics of pessimism because it believes that interpretation is always distorted by power. Novel idea, they're, always distorted by power.

Now it does hold out hope that if you accept the Marxist solution about economics and the economic basis of power that you might be able to come to a situation where by being eternally vigilant you would be able to keep communication free from the influence of power. And if you did that then the effect would be that life would go as it should. What does should

mean here? Life would go freely. It would be an expression of freedom. And essentially the Rousseau and Marxist picture is what we're talking about here.

A deconstruction stands off to the side of the other two movements in the following respect. It has almost no concern at all about values, about straightening out communications, rectifying distorting influences, it neither praises prejudice nor damns it. Hermeneutics praises prejudice. One of the structures of hermeneutics that is that is elicited is, we always interpret from prejudice. We never can get out of prejudice. We don't need to according to Gadamer because it's essentially a benign sort of thing and any particular error we may making the making because of prejudice can be corrected but we never get to the point where no prejudgment is governing our interpretation. Deconstruction cares very little for these sorts of considerations. Deconstruction is fundamentally a radical ontological doctrine. It simply says, "You never find identities in reality. There are no Identities. And it argues that line. Maybe I'll give you a reference here I think to. Maybe I won't. Maybe I lost it.

Page 63. Page 63 of Derrida's, Introduction to Husserl's Origin of Geometry, speech 63. I got it and page look also on page 104. And you'll find these arguments and let me just list 153 as the end. Basically what it says is that, "at every movement every pulse of time. The relations of everything change. It's a fundamental Heidegger collection notion. At every pulse of time the relations of everything changes. Since things do not exist apart from their relations. They change. Consequently everything is in constant change. There are no identities." You create an illusion of identity in order to cope with life so dirty dog does not reject what I had said earlier about identity as a condition to the possibility of knowledge. You create illusions of identities or of what he calls presence if some of you heard that word. What a presence just means genuine identity. There are in reality no such thing but we create illusions of prejudice and from that we

get our stable world, our stable meanings, our stable houses and personalities and all of that with the writer, none of it exists. And of course, what makes deconstruction interesting is that with this with this layout of the foundation it then adds on interesting descriptions of what maintains the illusions of present prejudice of presence in our social institutions, in our language and so on, and these are all what he calls idealities. The only things that have presence are idealities, and idealities are by reford, by definition on realities. So then, what we really have are the particular ongoing social processes, historical processes, what he call, transcendental history, the social realities moving, not identical, but connected by difference one stage differs from the next. I won't drag you through all the language about traces and logo centrism and all of that sort of thing was I doubt it would do any good, but the basic idea is just as I have stated. There are no identities because things are constantly changing and every change makes a different thing, it refuses to accept the difference between essential property and accidental. So every change means a change of the thing itself and then the creation of the illusion of identity primarily through language. And primarily through written language. Written language is above all the great creator of ideal presences, which make up a world that technology can function in. And so it's very important for us to see through these illusions and understand it's not clear why it's important, but it's very important to see it through these illusions and understand that all of the sameness's are in fact not real.

So all identity is lost. We started out back with the Greeks. Identity was fundamental. We wind up in the present period the overriding argument or the overriding thesis for all of this all of this thinking in the post-modernist and the modernist is nominalism and the falling back into some sort of social social reality.

Okay, any comments or remarks you want to make or questions you want to raise about that. I'm moving faster than I wish. But, Seems like I've got to.

It's hard to get good stuff on. Let me just pass those around and you may want to glance over them and get the titles or something. But it's hard to get good stuff. If it's digestible it usually is so superficial and of course if it's not superficial it's indigestible. Norris is a good critical interpreter. This, "What's wrong with postmodernism." He's a good critical interpreter. He's written books on Derrida, he's very balanced. This book is very often you find him defending Derrida against silly criticisms. And that's good. But he's pretty merciless in his own criticisms of Derrida. It's a good writer. The other one is just a nice summary for a sort of undergraduate. Sort of undergraduate level summary of not only Derrida but Foucault and others that you might want to look at.

Okay,

Student 2:

Did you hear those two sentences together?

Dallas Willard:

I'm sorry.

Student 2:

You said, "He's merciless in his criticism of Derrida." He's a good writer.

Dallas Willard:

Oh well I didn't mean the second the second to fall from follow from the form, I meant to say I meant to encourage you to believe that he was intelligible, but my string was, he defends him against stupid criticism, he's merciless in his own criticism, and he's a good writer.

Okay, now let's turn to these issues and we just begin to skate across them and I'll try to complete now what I'm going to do now in about 15 minutes and leave the last part of the time for discussion and also if you want to get references off these other books you can hear later.

Postmodernism is not something to which the concerned Christian intellectual can be indifferent. Both for what it has to offer as well as well as to the threats it poses. First of all on page 10, I raise the issue of the spiritual nature of humans and of God is consciousness of linguistic gods to. Now, this is a set of issues. Post Modernism is not antithetical to a spiritual interpretation of human life. It is not essentially anti God. It does in some measure throw us back into the problems of, let's say, the first fifteen hundred years of the Christian Epoch. In which the problem was not so much is there a God, but how many are there. So for example, when you read Spinoza's Ethics, you find that one of his belabored points is there's only one.

See our problem today is often is there a God. But of course we know now that I mean we have serious people in the universities sponsoring what is essentially a return to worship of pre-Christian deities under the name of postmodernism. I have a colleague at USC who goes to see her shaman up in Iceland and gets all sorts of interesting information about the goddess. And herself and writes all this up and it's taken very seriously. And if you were to write up your experiences with Jesus Christ and submit that for credit as a scholarly publication you probably wouldn't get much credit for that, but you can get it for dealing with essentially pre-Christian deities. And not and not in just a historical archaeological scholarly way. I mean in terms of one on one interaction.

So this is an interesting issue. Is consciousness linguistic? I don't think that the postmoderns are locked into that, but they tend to go that route. If consciousness is linguistic then Gods consciousness is linguistic to, isn't it. If consciousness is linguistic. So I mean we're

into a problem here we had a nice discussion with John Hick a couple of years ago. The APA meeting about concepts and Gods concepts and see he's got this all tied down to concepts are linguistic and they develop through history and all that sort of thing. So we got into a nice discussion about what were concepts going to be like in the afterlife what God's concepts are like and so on and it rather difficult for him to deal with that. But this is a set of issues. It is vital for us today to rethink our view of the human self. I mean, jumping a little ahead of myself to the bottom of the page, but Mr. Hunter's data that he uses in his writings, you were given readings from Hunter. I tell you there are some serious, I think some serious issues to be raised about his data other than the ones he raised. And frankly I will tell you that I've had a great deal of experience on Christian college campuses and one of the problems with maintaining the faith on the Christian College Christian campuses, well there are a lot of them, but one of them is that the spiritual life is not flowing deep and wide. My friends, and I have experienced this myself. I've seen it and so I mean if we want our young people to have a sense of the spiritual nature of human beings and of God we better bring the spiritual nature nigh unto them and help them get involved in it and so on, but this is a real issue and post-modernism faces a God's eye view.

Here I think that we are we are at a point where there, we're going to have to have some disagreement with postmodernism. My understanding of Christianity is that there is one true story. Not necessarily about everything, but about the most fundamental things, that revelation is designed to give us that story, not anyone's interpretation of Revelation, but revelation, that there is a final truth about things, something. And that text do have objective meanings. And so that's just a list of things. I don't have time to. We won't have time to go over those in detail, but I want to float them out here and say, "look folks, this is a site where we've got a problem." Now, the important thing for us is to not leap too fast one way or the other, but to take it piecemeal look at

it. For example, looking into this text of the scripture, there is a real problem for folks. I mean I don't know what you make, for example, did God really want Joshua to stone Aiken's sisters and cousins and aunts and dogs and cats and all of them? You see. What this is a true record of we have to think out. This can be a true record of what actually happened there. I don't know how you do with making decisions about drawing lots and all that sort of thing. I don't know how you read what happened there. They drew lots and they took this tribe and they took this family and they took Achan, and Achan owned up. I don't know how you read whether or not God wanted them to do what they did to him, but I do know later on. You are forbidden to kill someone for the death of their parents and God says, "Don't do that anymore."

That's the famous statement, "the soul that sinneth, shall die" which is not the point of which is not, if you sin you'll die, It is if you don't sin you won't die for somebody else's sin. Alright, okay, now we have to come to terms with the realities of our text and leave off the shibboleths and that will open the way for us to treat the Bible as a book of knowledge. That if we aren't careful with it and understand that we can't just take any interpretation that pops into our head but we have to have one again the hermeneutical principle of interpreting the parts in the light of the whole and the whole in the light of the parts very simple principle has to be followed. Given all of that, I believe the text have an objective meaning. I believe there is a final truth. I believe there is one true story that I thought his revelations about, that it gives us the god's eye view and I believe that it gives us a God's eye view because we can't get it on our own. And that's why we have the Bible. It's because we needed to know things we cannot know on our own and of course that doesn't dispense with the institutions which are necessary to mediate that knowledge effectively to us.

Thirdly the meaning of intellectual scientific scholarly work. Is it simply a matter of whatever goes goes for as long as it goes, or is it a matter of arriving at this truth? This objective truth and reality? I think we have to admit candidly that the reading in terms of whatever goes goes for as long as it goes, is a pretty authentic one for a lot that goes on and there isn't anything necessarily wrong with that. On the other hand to say that that is all there is to it is further than I can go with what goes. I think that there is a sense in which truth transcends and reality transcends what goes and that we are constantly called to be faithful to that. We are constantly called above all in relationship to the institutions that are nearest and dearest to us. And that's that's the prophetic challenge. The example that is set in the scriptures of the prophet as the outsider who is right even though everyone else says he is wrong and even though the institutions are against him.

Finally the issue of exclusive inclusivism, again, so many issues are raised here, postmodernism obviously pulls us towards enthusiasm. Inclusivism obviously says that cultures and institutions have their own internal logic which we should respect and I think thus far stated that is true. I respect the integrity of Hinduism. I respect the logic of Islam and I really think that that is a Christian duty. And I can formulate a pluralism which is nothing but an expression of the command to love God and your neighbor as yourself. I can do that, but that I stopped short of saying everyone's right or as I often read people who write on pluralism in religion everyone is equally wrong and no one knows nothing no how.

I don't think that's where we come out. I think we can learn a lot from postmodernism. I would be extremely surprised if God had nothing to do with Hinduism or Confucianism. I think he runs a tighter ship than that. And so there are a lot of other things that might be said, but I do believe that Paul's statement in Acts 17 about Jesus Christ being appointed as the standard by

which all men will be judged is the way it's going to be. Now how it's going to be handled I can leave that to God, but I am not willing to give up that point of reference which says, and you know when I get in discussions with my homosexual friends and all of that there's no point in discussing with them whether or not homosexuality is right until you decide what is the difference between right and wrong. Who are we measuring things about? And if they're willing to measure their homosexuality against Jesus or Paul I'm ready and I have no question about what the judgment will be. My object is not to condemn them, but I do believe that there is a right or wrong in such things. I believe that's sponsored by the Scriptures and all questions, serious questions of interpretation so on the side, we still have to deal with them. Major avenues of response.

The single most important thing for us to do today as Christian intellectuals is to get serious about the existence of God. I mean we just don't deal with this issue well. There are some contemporary opportunities of a rhetorical nature, and rhetoric is important. I've been astonished at the response of the general public including news people, like Gary Cutely and others to the confirmation that there was a big bang.

I have a hard time with it because they're being totally irrational about it but I'm glad they're being irrational about it in a way and they say well you know maybe there is a God. Now, I believe and I believe I can convince a fair minded person, not necessarily defined by whether or not they are convinced. I believe I can convince anyone that the issue of The Big Bang has nothing to do with the existence of God and that if there were no Big Bang all of the arguments for God's existence are still in place. But this is a contemporary opportunity. It gives us an opportunity to raise the question about the nature of God and the existence of God and what it is for us to speak about there being a spiritual reality which could possibly bang so big. And I think

we should we need to step into that. All right. And we need to we need to look at the standard evidences about the existence and nature of God.

The usual response among evangelical people and intellectuals today to this is a great big ho hum yawn. Like, well you know, we're all saved by faith or what do you think you're going to reason people into heaven or something of that sort. I'm not talking about getting them, I'm talking about the people who are already in and don't understand what they're in on. And we really need to work on this and then secondly we need to get serious about the Spiritual side of human beings. And boy do we ever have a field to work on here. Art, psychology, mathematics, all of these things. These are aspects that we need to be. What in the world is art really about? How desperately we need today a Christian interpretation of art that is convincing without any reference to being Christian. That is just a good interpretation of art. And I think if we do that we are invariably going to come out with a very convincing presentation of the spiritual aspect of man. And I think that same thing works if we look carefully at what intellectual research is about. And when it comes to this issue of of the nature of the Spiritual life that is something that isn't just prayer. My own view is that the image of God in human beings is creativity. I think that's what it's talking about in Genesis 1 is creativity. It's not having mystical experiences, it isn't contemplating concepts and so on. It is living. It is living richly in a culture. It is living richly in diverse cultures. I mean, I really have a hard time believing that all the diversity of human cultures is just an accident. I think God likes them. I often wonder, why did he make so many kinds of sheep? And well I think He maybe He like them. Do you know how many kinds of sheep there are? Chickens? Awful lot of different kinds of chickens and sheep. Dogs and people even got in on that some. Variety is a wonderful thing, so we need to hear our avenues response, gets serious about the existence of God, and gets serious about the Spiritual side of human

beings, of course including the Spiritual life itself. We're going to have to get our religion out of the category of church attendance and conformity to our group. Yeah I say we're going to have to get our religion out of church attendance and conformity to our group.

Student 2:

Yeah but we've institutionalized it so and if we're pushed [inaudible] to choose between God and our institutionalized Christianity evangelicalism I'm not, I pray we would choose God, but I'm not...

Dallas Willard:

I hope so since it's been around long time for evangelicalism got here.

Student 2:

I know, but I think that's.

Dallas Willard:

Ok now that, this is central to your group. This is central to the issue of integration of faith and learning. What you're saying, and I agree with that. I mean it's just like they said to Luther, "Where are you going to go if they drive you out of the church?" And he said "out under the stars." Out under the stars. So, I mean, this is a fundamental question of allegiance, and we have to be careful about overreaction and hostility for its own sake and all of those things, but we cannot we cannot have a spiritual life that consists of mere conformity and our church programs don't recommend enough to us to be serious very often. I mean really, going to church twice a week, once a week, giving some money, occasionally witnessing. How can you make a spiritual life out of that? You can't do that. You have to understand that your life is your whole life and to make that spiritual is the goal and that's what Christ calls us to and says, "Hey I'll show you how to do it. I'll live with you there in the middle of that until you know how to do it."

Now over on the last page, what I want to say is that this is the toughest part to go on because you know everyone has sort of farmed this kind of stuff out to people like J.P. and me because that's our business, but folks if we're going to be Christian intellectuals we've got to come to our own understanding of what quality or character or if you wish essence is, identity. What is identity? Reason, consciousness, sensations, sense perception, what is knowledge? We have to have our own, we work out our own understanding of this. This is not a lifetime Task and perhaps this kind of seminar is a group in which you work on this. I'm naturally assuming that because I came here to harass about it today, and but I do have to say that I think that on these matters Christians tend to be mentally lazy and irresponsible and just do what serves them in their professional setting. Whether they're ministers, perhaps even more so if they're ministers because well I will go into that because no none of them are here, so well, such matters are easily dismissed as merely philosophical and what all I'm saying is we must not do that. We must really come to terms with identity and consciousness and knowledge. Stop being bullied and beat around by this. I mean this this whole. I constantly go to preach in groups of Christians often many other minister groups and they all believe that they are their brain. They believe their their brain. And they'll just tell you that, and you say, "Well have you ever realized what you're thinking about this? You your brain your brains are going to rot when you die." And you have to tell them you know the brain is a part of your body, you use it, it's a very important part of your body and all that. Aristotle thought it was a cooling system, looks kind of like that, but you know he's wrong but still it's just a part of your brain. And I mean this is a fundamental issue of course I know you guys that are in psychology you've got a harder row to hold on this because you've got your professions set against you on this. And that's tough. And I know it is J.P. and I get into it on the periphery because we argue things like so-called identity thesis or functionalism, but it

all comes out the same place. The person is the brain. You have people like Dan Dennett writing books on consciousness explain and so far as you can tell he hasn't even met consciousness yet. But it's taken very seriously. So these are big issues. You know the other thing I would say is as Christians it will help us a lot to follow to read the history of our profession. Read old books. Look at how the methods have changed. Most of us have a profession that's been here for some time. Look at the reasoning's which have been given. Try to learn from the history of our profession and that sometimes can be very very enlightening. So my final shot is take the Bible seriously as a book of knowledge.

Now if we've done the previous things then I think we can do this. We can take the Bible seriously as a book of knowledge that translates into things like suppose Jesus had good sense. Just suppose. Read the Bible on that assumption. Suppose Moses was not some dummy shepherd walking around wringing his hands. He's smart person that was actually dealing with God about life. That's what I mean when I say take the Bible seriously as a book of knowledge. For many of us it has retreated, partly under the impact of our professional associations to where it's just a cut above both inches mythology. And it isn't. We have to learn how to read it as if it were a book of knowledge written by smart people, for smart people. And you know in our setting it's almost blasphemous to suggest that Jesus was a smart man. As if somehow that's to attack his divinity. Well I can't imagine his divinity in any other company. Right. So you see that the idea of Jesus as a teacher as intellectual has been taken away from us by the fundamentalist liberal controversy. The fundamentalist heard the liberals say, "oh he's a wonderful teacher" and they said, "Well he wasn't a teacher. He's a sacrifice." We need to say to them, hey you know he could be both. Wouldn't be any contradiction if he were both in fact might make both of them a lot

better. But we are up against a history and ideology which can be quite merciless and we have to stand against them.

I'll quit. Any comments? Rectifications?

Yes I'm sorry. I will thank you for. I wanted to say something about them. See what Hunter has done. Has he read, correct me if I'm wrong because I haven't spent a lot of time reading this, I picked up the book on evangelicalism when it came down came out and looked at it thought about it a bit. Well what he is saying is essentially that the intellectual academic context itself is deleterious to belief. I don't think that's true. I would challenge him to prove that. I think he has not proven the causal connection. I think what he has found is that faith is deleted on the on the academic campus, but I don't think he's found the reasons why. And I think the reasons why are, the impoverishment of the spiritual life that exists on academic campuses.

There's a lot to that Virginia. I mean there's a lot to the idea that you go on the campus and you get put through the hoops and you tend to substitute that for your life in Christ. And it's mighty thin stuff. I mean I went to some schools where the, I was just one jump away from Bob Jones and I went to school where you went to chapel every time and once a week you brought in how many people you had witness to and you wrote it down on a card and other activities you did and you turned that in. No. It's awfully easy to do that and have absolutely nothing in the way of a life with Christ.

Student 2:

I had a conversation about this with a freshman class. What they do do is get up and get dressed for lunch as if they have been to church. You know, I mean, I'm thinking to myself, are these kids sub-normal? No, but they're not going to see through that when they start asking

themselves what is church about and if that comes to be a valid and accepted and if we sanction it implicitly or [inaudible] then we've got major problems and we if in some level perpetuate.

Dallas Willard:

Well how to deal with it is a deep issue. It has to be dealt with. It cannot be dealt with by just grinding it out and what we will do, it's just like Finney used to say of people who didn't know how to pray and they would try and he would say, "They prayed themselves into skepticism." And that happens people pray themselves and the skepticism. They perform themselves into skepticism and what we have to do is to have a religion which is deep and powerful enough in the reality of the Spiritual life that number one it moves us to complete transparency, no manipulation, just reality. And then two we can deal with young people, teach them, lead by example. If there's nothing wrong with suggesting activities for them or even requiring things. What is wrong is if we try to replace the Spiritual life with that sort of activity. Then we have slipped over into the righteousness describes in the Pharisees and too often, they are able to look at our lives and see the lack of genuine Spirituality in them and justify in their minds what they're doing by saying, "Well everyone does it." Everyone does it.

Student 2:

But I think the other thing [inaudible]. What I think is the most is one [Inaudible] things in a Christian [inaudible] therefore we become less spiritual. I

Dallas Willard:

Of course that's a theological flaw and historically false. Yes. Right. Sure. No I'm sure you would. Absolutely not. Absolutely not. Oh I agree.

We do need to look at it that's a part of what I'm saying here is we have to look at those kinds of issues because I'll tell you postmodernism is coming down the track in the form of New

Age religion. We're going to be coming here. We're going to lose our people to it. Read Allan Bloom's book, recent book on American religion and while it is a very misleading, misleading, misguided book in many respects, it's still just too much truth in it. I mean he.

[Silence to the end]