

Postmodernism- Philosophical and Historical Roots 1 part 2

By Dallas Willard

[Transcription note: only Dr. Willard had a microphone, so many questioners/commenters are inaudible]

Dallas Willard:

...rational that this is tied to the general obligation to do good prevent evil or at least do no harm and in order to achieve that end you have to know. Now how do you know you know and what knowledge is that still stands there but still what I'm saying is as as a social and personal reality knowledge remains the only basis for responsible action then the next paragraph thickens the soup by pointing out that possession of knowledge or knowledge technique determines who has the right to act and in what way one has a right to act. Know I list areas here we won't go into them. I think it's obvious Surgery Education political office whatever it may be. I mean my my right to be here and talk to you surely is based upon the idea that I'm supposed to know something right. And so you are all in that same position constantly you walk in your classroom. You're right to be there and talk to those kids is based upon the possession of knowledge.

So that's inescapable. As I see it. And that's what makes this such a tremendously important issue. I mean one I really liked to zing at the when I'm specially speaking to ministers

conferences and. Seminary folks is what is the knowledge basis of the practice of the ministry. Or of the practice of. New Testament studies or whatever it may be. It's got to be one. What is it? So I think we all concede the basic platonic principle of selfocracy, those with knowledge should be the ones who act lead and govern. Now I put that in here just to say. That we can't we can't avoid this. Whatever we say about post-modern Modern we still got to deal with this. You want to say something. [inaudible comment] ha-ha well the realities are a little hard on us. But they should be. Wouldn't you agree? See I'm I've I've weaseled on you here. I didn't say they are I say should be. Well no he do. He knew the problems of real Prosto ideal and he certainly thought he was should. He never got away from this problem of how we actually get there. He says at the end of the Republic you know he says well this is the city we're talking about may exist only in heaven or whatever.

So he knew the problem. But I guess what I wanted to nail down here and see if I get your agreement on is that fundamentally. We've got to draw this line. We've got to understand what knowledge is. Because the very way we hold one another responsible the rights we concede to one another. So. I mean my right to drive on the roads. Is conditioned upon my knowledge. Supposedly. And I have a little certificate with my picture on it that says I can do it. So. Everything we do. This distinction is not an idle one is what I'm saying and what I'm really trying to do here is drive home the importance of this debate between whatever. I get uncomfortable talk about modern and postmodern. And I know that the lines aren't all that clear but there is an issue here. And now I'm going to try to make it clearer in a moment. But did someone else have comments or, yes. [inaudible question] Right on that's, right. Sure.

Speaker 2:

I wonder if it is a simple knowledge base when it really seems that... [inaudible]

Dallas Willard:

Well I want to include knowing that and knowing how. Now before and before I knew how. To put on the brakes without throwing everyone through the windshield. I knew that that was the brake. I didn't know how to do it but I knew that was so. Of course one of the big ways of putting much of the debate we're looking at is to say that this always reduces to this, that theory is just another practice. And you hear people like Stephen Toulmin and Rorty and others they especially like these phrases there is just another practice. And we'll see how that works as we go along here because we will be digging deeper into things like language games and so on but in response to your question in most of our professions the certificate involves knowing how.

Now there's an interesting point here about the Ph.D. Which is always I've always found quite stunning. If you want to teach third grade students you have to have courses in education. But if you if you have a Ph.D. You don't have to have any course in education. In any university I know of having a Ph.D. supposedly is supposed to mean you know how to teach one of those little ironies that. Is often puzzling. [inaudible comment] Well said ha-ha. [inaudible question] Well basically knowing that as a matter of believing certain things and being right about them and having good reasons for it and so on. I knew that that was the break because I'd seen my father put the brake on I knew what it did to the car and so forth and so on. I knew that I did know that I believed it was true. I had reason to believe that now what has happened is the reinterpretation under the influence of people like Wittgenstein and Heidegger and we will talk

more about this later of knowing that as more behavior namely linguistic behavior in a world.

Now knowing how to behave linguistically. Is just knowing how.

And by the way if you read if you care to look at this book you will see how thoroughly that idea of theory is picked up by later postmodernists. See knowing that is just this. This presupposes the points I'm going to go over like the total linguisticization of consciousness. That will govern behavior. Language Language behavior.

Speaker 3:

...just a strategy for actualizing...

Dallas Willard:

Yeah right. That's. So applied to. [inaudible comment] Applied to our issue about PhD and so on when you go in with all of your intricate knowledge about the Raymond lull or somebody like that some obscure figure in history and you sit down and for two hours they go after you your knowledge that consists of your knowing how to respond in that context. And knowing how means there's a right and a wrong. And you managed to stay on the side of the right. Now what determines the right? Well the context determines the right. [inaudible question] Well. Oh it is. No it is indeed. And you'll notice that language now has become something very strange. And we do want to talk about that this afternoon so go ahead make your- [inaudible comment] Well right. [inaudible comment] You know there are very interesting differences gets into this business. See I'm one of the people who is hoping that tomorrow they will make their

first successful brain transplant. It's going to clear up a lot of things. We want to talk about that later.

But certainly I mean now for example if you say that this knowledge is in the body it doesn't necessarily mean it's in the central central nervous system might be in the arms lips. Right. So that's that's a big issue in itself as to where we locate that and especially in teaching. Now it is very important in academic circles to learn what to do with your eyebrows. So. Right on. OK now I want to begin to dig a little deeper. And of course your intonations and all of that which go with the voice as well as the eyebrows and shoulders how you turn away from people is a great art. So now then the question I'm going to move more into this issue of how the ways of identifying knowledge and then how that fits into our present culture and adds to the actually adds to the support of postmodernism as a as an approach and interpretation of knowledge.

My own view is that postmodernism would never have arisen apart from the evolution of. Intellectual culture. In such a way that it really did make postmodernism seem right. I mean one way of reading someone like Dary [inaudible] or others or Habermas is to say well they're just describing what actually happens. Right. It's just describing what actually happens. And now then one might say well. Contrary to what Virginia has suggested this hasn't been going on all this time. This is a recent development. We used to be able to know what knowledge it was and what reality was and all of that but now things have come to the point where we can no longer do that. So the issue now has to do with how do we identify knowledge. And I began to talk about that at the bottom of page 3 as you see there. How do I identify knowledge? How identify those who know. Right. So we remember the case of Moses. And Moses was given some phenomena that he could do.

Now you have to think about what was supposed to do. Moses said I don't want to go down here and talk to these people they're going to say who sent me or who sent you. And how am I going to. How how am I going to respond? And so Moses was given some astonishing signs. If you were to walk into your classroom with a stick and throw it down and it became a snake. You would get some respect. People would think you knew something. [inaudible joke comment] ha-ha, So now I've put that over against the Connecticut Yankee and King Arthur's court story you all know the idea is that power. Is a sign of knowledge. And legitimization in science often has to do with the same sort of thing. I mean when you when you. Are able to take small quantities of certain substances and blow up whole cities people are inclined to think you know something about the structure of matter.

So now we just bring those sorts of things up to say how do we know that someone knows. [inaudible comment] Yes that's probably true. Well he you see I've. This is the kind of thing where people perform all sorts of stunts and you don't know what they know. You don't know. I mean we kind of enjoy it because we can sort of understand it. I mean he knows a little bit about gunpowder and scares the wits out of him knows when the sun is going to eclipse and uses that but just so there's no real connection possibly here between knowing and effects but effects is one of the things that we tend to use. I've often had people say to me I know that Jesus is the son of God because He rose from the dead. And I say if Hitler rose from the dead would you believe he's the son of God. I wouldn't. I want to know something else about him than just he rose from the dead.

So I'm reading these to say you know we we have to watch this this. There's something going here. Affects are important. But affects really aren't a very good basis for. Claiming knowledge because effects they have something to do with knowledge. But it just isn't true that

you can go from effects to knowledge because you never know what produces the effects. So I put down here two general criteria effects have a role in it and really folks now this is this. This is I think the deepest issue that we talk about all day and that is the difference between the inherent nature of knowing. And Social certification. And it's this above all that provides the epistemic room for. Postmodernism to emerge. So you have. Let's say. Your Knower here [writes on a whiteboard]. And your subject matter here [writes on a whiteboard]. And supposedly knowledge of some kind of relationship between them. And traditionally. And by traditionally I sort of mean up until the time of the 19th century you begin to get this chipped away at. Knowledge was something that was owned by the knower. The knower was in a special kind of state. And that was often spelled out by reference to two things. Two general kinds of things. Perception. And inference. Everyone understood that it was not enough to believe to have knowledge. Everyone understood that you could believe and be wrong. That's no one I think has ever, except some of the softest Gorgias and a few other guys back there might have wanted to say something different about it.

But basically the idea the classical idea has been that knowledge is a matter of the state of the knower not every state is a state of knowledge. And when we begin to look at knowledge we find that it may be pure perception, pure inference or some combination. Now traditionally inference has been regarded as questionable whereas perception has been if you can get it has been regarded as solid stuff. If you see it that's the way it is and if it turns out that it wasn't that way the standard response has been you didn't see it. You thought you saw it but you didn't see it. So you find in Aristotle you find in Descartes you find in Hume all of them saying if you really see something that's the way it is as you go along it turns out that there's less and less you can really see for example for Hume you couldn't possibly see a table. In fact you can't see

anything that's very interesting for him for Descartes you can see some things that are very interesting but they all happened to be inside your mind for Aristotle and Plato you can see lots of things that are very interesting and they're both in your mind and out in the world.

So there's a lot of difference there. Now. So this is the one model you see I put here intrinsic inherent nature. So suppose I wanted to know whether or not I knew something well then I would reflect on whether or not I was in the appropriate state right. And there has emerged in our time a kind of threefold analysis of the conditions of knowing. Belief. That. P, let's have P stand for a proposition here. P is true. and 3. Some kind of. The let's just say the circumstances are right. There's been a lot of debate over. What these are. But this is generally known as the justified. True. Belief. Theory. Of. Knowledge. So when Descartes wants to know whether or not he exists. What does he do? He reflects on his mind doesn't he? And he doesn't just perceive he actually makes an inference though as philosophers tend to do. They've made a long hassle out of whether or not it was an inference or not but he reflects on the fact that he's thinking. And he says well even if I'm mistaken I've got to be thinking in order to be mistaken.

So if I'm thinking I must exist because everything which has any property whatsoever exists if thinking is a property and I have that property I must exist. Now what I am. Well that's a longer story. But you see I believe that I exist. I'm in a position to know this and in fact I do exist. Now that has been this whole approach to knowledge generally speaking in the in the 19th and 20th century gets. Gets uh flooded away by a theory of the mind which we're going to call representationalism. And I just want to. Bring this up at this point we'll have to return to it later a theory known as representational ism that is this is the idea that. Classically the only. Objects. Of perception. Are. Your. Own. Ideas. Or representations. Now this is the classical version which is modified post-Wikenstinian and we can talk about that as we go along. But fundamentally if you

think from Descartes through John Stuart Mill or the middle of the 19th century the end of the 19- even in the 20th century really you still find people. Discussing this version.

G.E. Moore for example in the 50s the last paper he wrote on perception he was still asking and says What is the relationship between what I immediately see and what is out there. The basic idea here is the only objects of perception are your own ideas of representation of what that means is you can never ask and answer the question do my representations correspond with reality. Because when you get to what you call reality what have you got. More representations. Now that that little move. Is repeated in the linguistic versions of representational wisdom that you find in everyone from old people like Hilary Putnam today to Derry Dawe. So that you can't get outside there is no as Derry Dawe would say there is no ultimate signified.

All you get when you inquire into the signified of a signifier is another signifier and you live in a, everything is textualized so that language just leads to more language and you never get out you never get out. And that's the key phrase and that is what. With one other point. Rules out this criteria of intrinsic inherent nature we cannot judge whether or not we have knowledge. By examining our own states. Because we can't get out of our own states to examine what they're supposedly about. Now on page 4 I want to add this comment. I'm not here today to give you my versions of this picture. But I will have to say some things about. My version and one of the things I want to say is that "A" fails in our culture because of it. And I'm sorry about the bad writing. "It's" there refers to our cultures. Could you. I was moving too fast here "A" fails in our culture because of our culture's rejection of the mental spiritual generally from the category of knowledge. Our culture is a sensate culture and its epistemology. It isn't something that someone thought up necessarily it just came around that way. And I've I've put in your hand out- [End]