

Postmodernism & Christian Theology (Part 4 Disc 2)

By Dallas Willard

Dallas Willard:

Now have a causal basis God injected me with grace and I suddenly came up with a vision of the Trinity, but that's a different, that's a causal basis. So, you have to. Now distinguish the two cases. We're not talking about bases. Okay, that's not knowledge. You can have belief, you can have opinion, or you can have of wild conjecture commitment without knowledge. It's kind of hard to sustain but you can. Now once you come into the knowledge area then you have to say, "Where is your basis" and one way is to just cut it off here and say, "well we hold a bunch of beliefs" and there is they aren't particularly hierarchically organized and then you could cite things like, practical pragmatic considerations. It works. Or aesthetic consideration is beautiful. That would be. Or coherence. See, that would be non-foundationalist basis right? Or you could have a foundationalist basis and you could say there are certain beliefs which are not based on other beliefs that are the basis of all of our beliefs. Then at that level you have the further question. Will you say, these are based on something just not other beliefs for example based on examining a world which they are about and quite frankly I will tell you no gartner's, no, no regardless of what anyone may say about it. If you as a practitioner were to try to sustain your knowledge without examining the facts which they are about you'd be in trouble. See, that's because when you get out here in the real world we're not talking philosophy anymore, we're talking life and death. So you examine things that you have beliefs about and that no matter what anyone says about it, as I often say to in these kinds of discussions, when postmodernist go to discuss discuss their fringe benefits they are realists.

They believe in correspondence. They really do because they are thinking, no this is not what my statement said. What you said to me and my contract. Here's how it is. So I'm just saying when you get out in the real world you're going to be a foundationalist and you're going to be a foundationalist that relates to beliefs to a world which you have to examine to see how it is and it doesn't matter what your subject matter is, that will always be the case. And if you don't do that, you're going to be pretty quickly questioned about your competence. So, but you have though are those options philosophically. You can say, "These are based on the real world, they're based on nothing." Now, someone who takes the first option and says, "These aren't matters of belief" then perhaps they often do. They will come back and say, "There is no special knowledge at all, because it gets very lonely. If you're standing out you're saying, "Well I don't have knowledge, everyone else has knowledge." So, theological theology for example has downgraded radically. If it has to stand there and say, "This is not knowledge but physics is." So, what you typically find from the people who take no knowledge view is they come back to the old too [inaudible] you to baby. Physics, you don't know either. You just have theories and you construct them and you live in the house of your theories. I have the logical theory and I live in the house of my theories. So then you're down to that little game in the corner of the Checker board. You know where you can move back and forth endlessly and never get caught. You don't get anywhere, but you don't get and that's a great temptation within the language gain interpretation [inaudible]. But see you again, it all comes back, you're trapped inside of something. And that idea of being trapped inside it is one that some postmodernist try to respond to. Rorty himself does and ah one person we probably won't mention much here, but there's a guy named, Gadamer who has book called Truth and method. Which is, I think, the masterpiece

in terms of solidity of argument and conceptualization, but it's not the sort of thing you would want to read on a holiday. Easier than Heidegger.

Speaker 1:

I'm sorry, what did you mean about Gadamer, was?

Dallas Willard:

Gadamer is, I think, the best person to read on all of these kinds of issues. His book Truth and Mater.

Speaker 1:

And you saying he comes out. etc. etc.

Dallas Willard:

Well he comes out trying to deal in a very careful way with this issue being trapped. And there are few others that do. Rorty will wave his hand at it occasionally, but since he's already declared it's not an issue it's not something he would work hard on.

Well let's take a break now and when we come back I want to take a look at a couple of these passages especially, and I will keep working on the questions. So if your question didn't get addressed we'll keep working in them.

Good, let's just finish up a little bit here on the Rorty selection. I'm going to pass over the discussion. I'm putting them here because it's a little more technical I think than we need to get into. Basically he's, he's chiding, putting them for hanging back on accepting his ethnocentric interpretation of the standards of justification and still insisting on certain kinds of criteria that are beyond the local cultural form. So I think I have to try to do anything with that here.

On page 582, first paragraph, opening there I have an arguing that we pragmatists should grasp the ethnocentric horn of the dilemma. We should say that we must in practice privilege our

own group even though there can be no non-circular justification for doing so. We must insist that the fact that nothing is immune from criticism does not mean that we have a duty to justify everything. So, we don't try to adjust everything in particular the norms that are applied in the processes of justification and we don't try to talk about human nature. This is a part of Rorty's postmodernism. Theirs just the way we live now. As he says at the bottom of that paragraph, the preferences that we have for certain methods and so on in our fields or in our culture is simply a matter of just the way this is how we live now, but will we might we change? Yes we might and there's no giving of an account of how we change in the sense that this has to then be justified. Change in how we think and how we do inquiry whether it's in a particular field or in a more general sense, has a lot of causes, but they, whatever else you say about them, they are not justified by reference to some community transcendence standard of what counts as good work or as truth or is knowledge.

Top of 583 he says, "The pragmatist, dominated by the desire for solidarity can only be criticized for taking his own community too seriously. He can only be criticized where ethnocentrism, not for relativism, to be ethnocentric is to divide the human race into the people to whom one must justify one's beliefs and the others." The first group ones ethnos or people comprises though who share enough of once believed to make fruitful conversation possible. In this sense, everybody is ethnocentric when engaged in an actual debate because otherwise you wouldn't even be able to have debate. You have to share a set of assumptions and methods in order to have a debate. And then in the following pages. He does what is often done now days, he talks about how to accept his view, takes away what he calls here two sorts of metaphysical comfort and this is always discouraging to me to see people indulging in these sorts of explanations, but it does fit within the postmodernist paradigm to explain why people have the

views they have by reference to factors like, how comforting they may or may not be, and the one thing that you get comfort from he says, "Is the assumption that membership in our biological species carries certain natural rights" and he does not think that. We have a nature which guarantees that.

This picture of rights is biologically transmitted is so basic to political discourse in Western democracies that we are troubled by any suggestion that human nature is not a useful moral concept. And that's what he is suggesting is that. Then the second comfort is the thought that our community cannot wholly die. And the idea that what we have found virtuous and good will be perpetuated and the man will prevail as he says further on down something reasonably like our worldview our virtues our art will bob up again. I have no idea why he thinks that, that that is one of the things that the realist gets comfort from and he doesn't, but it's an interesting thing to say I guess. And he extends that on page 584 to suggest that, this is our way of believing in the immortality of our community, that we will go on.

Yes,

Student 2:

[Inaudible] inquire there, thinking down the road to define the man differently.

Dallas Willard:

Yes, well what he wants to say is that different groups do find, define the human being differently and that this is just a matter of how they have learned to talk in their particular ethnos. There's no deeper issue like what really is the human being because for him, just as there is no issue about what really is true what really is knowledge is likewise, he thinks this. See this is typical of the pragmatist who simply. What this amounts to saying is, that it's pointless to discuss this issue and anything that's pointless for the pragmatist is either dropped or treated as

something that you can have it in the way you wanted. So, now we need to ask before you're done with him, what is this solidarity that he's talking about and why is the solidarity more important in a sense in objectivity. Well it actually isn't. Perhaps more important it's just that objectivity is not available and hence cannot be a basis for solidarity. Solidarity see is a matter of us simply being able to get along with one another in common projects. That's what solidarity is for him and there isn't anything beyond that to reach for. You can and if you think that that can only be explained on the basis of truth, correspondence, objective reality or whatever, then where he says, "No, it's possible on another basis." We simply join in common projects and keep the conversation going and indeed in so far as we can reach out to other groups and do that then we will have solidarity with them. There's no, there's no a primary limit as to how far that these can go. 584, you know what are you interested in there.

Student 3:

Mike says, the first whole paragraph. My suggestions is desire for objectivity and [inaudible] for an attempt to avoid contingency who [inaudible] chance. arguably then, he seems to be embracing both contingencies [inaudible] hopes to see his work actually raises for example chance

Dallas Willard:

Well, well and moreover I mean it's very clear isn't it, that he is he is telling us the essence of something when he talks about solidarity, and uh so this is true of all the Nietzsche is. Like Nietzsche himself, you can make the same point against Nietzsche. He talks a lot about contingency and time and chance and so on, but it's obvious that he is laying down an eternal essence of the human being and of human history and of thought and so on. So this is just another illustration of this bind that people find themselves in when they deny certain things and

yet they're going on presupposes those things. That they are going on as if these things were true, but they are denying them and I catch that up into the formula which I've already given you a couple of times, that by the end of the 18th century, philosophers had already denied the reality of everything that was necessary to make philosophy.