

"Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light" (2Corinth.11: 14)

+ Lecture 5: Postmodernism & Social construction +

I) The Postmodern views:

Postmodernism denies that there is a single true way that things are. For example, when one person says that a painting is good, and another says the same painting is no good, we are not surprised, because we are familiar with the idea that beauty is in the eye of the beholder. Therefore there is no single true answer to the question, is this painting beautiful? There are as many answers as there are beholders, and no one has the exclusive truth. Postmodernism applies this thinking to morality. One person thinks that a particular action is wrong, another thinks that the same action isn't wrong and we shouldn't be surprised, they say. Just as with beauty, so with morality. There is no single true answer; no one has the exclusive truth. There is no single true answer to questions of right and wrong, just many perspectives.

The same is applied to religion. There is no one single truth about God or the Divine. There are many different perspectives and no one can say that they have the exclusive truth. In science also, they say that there is no single way of looking at the natural world. There are different theories and examples, and no one has the right to say that one is the single true way things are. There is no single true account of the world, just many perspectives.

The same thing can be applied to any area of life. In history there is no single way the world was, just many perspectives. In literatures there is no single meaning of a text, just many interpretations and a similar story can be given in politics, economics and so on. Postmodernism takes this approach in all areas; there is no single true way things really are, or at least we are not justified in taking a view as being the single true way things really are.

II) Postmodernism and religion:

Recently, sociologists have shown that 95% of adults believe in God or a universal spirit. While people are still interested in spiritual things today, the kind of spirituality means mystical experience not truth. We can seek and savor any experience we please, as long as we remain inclusive and tolerant.

Not long ago, intolerance meant persecuting practitioners of other religions. Not any more. Now, intolerance means questioning the validity of any aspect of another's religion. To the majority of Americans below fifty today, questioning the truthfulness of another's religious views is intolerant and morally offensive. This prohibition against differing with other's viewpoints is Postmodern.

Strangely, it turns out that one exception is allowed to this universal prohibition against intolerance. For some reason it's okay to question and even denounce religious views when dealing with what is detractingly labeled 'fundamentalism'. Today, when people refer to 'fundamentalists' they no longer just mean Muslim extremists waging holy war and terrorist attacks against the west. Today, fundamentalism may refer to those who believe religious teachings are either true or false, to anyone who claims to know the truth or who charges another religion with falsehood. According to Postmodernists, champions of Orthodoxy like Athanasius and Cyril of Alexandria are criticized for having one-sided views and for unwilling to listen to their adversaries with sympathy!

III) Social Construction:

There is an interesting relation between postmodernism and social construction. For example, when it is said that religious truth is a social construct then by challenging the truth claims of another's religion, we are considered devaluing the person who is the source of his or her own truth.

Another example of social construction is homosexuality. They say that homosexuality is not accepted because society has decided that it is wrong so if the society changes its mind and decides that it is acceptable then homosexuality will no longer be wrong.

Social construction leads to 'normalization' of sin by giving it new names. For example fornication is now called premarital sex, adultery is only cheating and heretics are now called Churches.

IV) Consequences:

The immediate consequence of the postmodern view of right and wrong is 'moral relativism'. There does not exist any universal moral law or value, any moral law or value is relative to a person's own narrative or narratives taught by the community where the person lives in. Therefore, we have the right to do whatever we desire. No one has the right to judge our actions. Morality has become a matter of desire instead of truth.

This false understanding of right and wrong as being a social construction process and that it is the culture that shapes the individual has led to minimization of the responsibility of the postmodern person for his / her actions. It is not the individual but the society or the culture to blame for a 'wrong' action.

V) Argument against Postmodernism:

Postmodernism is probably the most dangerous among the philosophies that were discussed in this convention because it hides itself behind famous Christians virtues like 'loving your enemies' and 'not judging others'. Postmodernism should remind us with the words of Christ, "Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves" (Matt.7: 15). If all truth-claims were relative, then what about the postmodern standards themselves? If all morals are a result of social construction and therefore relative, what about the values of freedom, peace, and tolerance upon which the postmodern argument is based?

We can agree with the postmodernists that language does affect how we understand or interpret our experience of this world and ourselves and that different individuals and cultures at different times may have different interpretations **but** the fact that we may have different interpretations or understandings of an event or a reality does not imply the this event or reality does not exist.

For example, although two people who observe an action from two different perspectives may have different interpretations to this action, this doesn't imply that there is no absolute truth to evaluate this action. In other words, relativism is not a necessary logical consequence of different interpretations.

In short, the fact that our understanding of reality may be shaped by our language and culture has no logical implication in the existence of an absolute reality. Not everything that we know is relative and constructed by the society or ourselves.

