

WTSU. Class Notes

Lesson 4 10/01/13

I. When talking about worldviews based on "ultimate reality" we mean by that term that which has always existed. In other words, if you could peel back time and history far enough, this is what you'd find.

II. In terms of ultimate reality, there are only three options and they are the three worldviews we'll examine:

1. 1. Naturalism - nature in the form of mass or energy is ultimate reality.
 - a) Naturalism denies there is any spiritual element in reality.
 - b) The essence of all things is material.
2. Non-naturalism that we'll call transcendentalism.
 - a) The root of transcendentalism is, of course, the word "transcend," meaning that which goes "beyond" or is "beyond" something and in the context of worldviews, it would mean that which goes beyond "nature," beyond the physical world.
 - b) Transcendentalism or non-naturalism says that ultimate reality, the true essence of things is spiritual. To the extent that a religion is associated with transcendentalism God is
 - (1) Not personal, and
 - (2) Immaterial, meaning pure spirit.
3. Theism.
 - a) Theism says neither of these worldviews is completely true.
 - (1) Theism agrees with the naturalist that the material world is real and denies that reality is some kind of illusion and spirit is all that is really real.
 - (2) Theism agrees with Transcendentalism that there is a spiritual aspect of reality, and denies naturalism's claim that there nature is all there is.

(3) So theism says there is a real material world and there is a spiritual world.

(4) But it also says that God is personal and God is distinct from the material world that we observe.

III. Naturalism and Transcendentalism give rise to one of the great philosophic questions throughout history: If there is a material/natural world and a spiritual world, how do they relate? In fact, if both realities exist, how can they relate and interact and intermingle with one another since their essence is difference, and there is no commonality?

IV. There are two solutions to this dilemma. Those two are

A. Monism.

B. Theism.

V. Monism is that at a very basic level says everything comes from one essence which is why some call it a "chain of being" view of the universe.

A. In that sense, naturalism and transcendentalism are similar as each denies the other's view of what is ultimate reality.

B. These three worldviews (naturalism, transcendentalism, and theism) are in antithesis to each other. They cannot be "harmonized."

VI. What does all this "monism" or "chain of being" stuff mean as a practical matter? Where in the world does it even show up such that it's relevant? Shows up, for example, in :

1. Evolution. It is a "chain of being" philosophy.

a) Nature is all there is and everything came from that original first thing whether it was energy or matter.

b) Evolution is a "chain of being" where everything is moving forward or progressing sort of horizontally - becoming a new man, a more evolved self, but still just a material being.

c) Helps explain why some scientists see no problem with cloning human beings or experimenting with embryonic stem cells.

(1) It's just matter or tissue. There is no other dimension that is being destroyed or altered. It advances man, it just speeds up the next stage in the evolution of man. We can help evolve man.

2. Transcendentalism - often thought of as pantheism but more than that - Hinduism, Buddhism - are all chain of being because god is IN nature - it's all one.

a) Like evolution, which says the all reality flows from one ultimate reality that is either mass or energy, transcendentalists it is the "spirit" that pervades everything that makes "one."

b) Like Yoda, the "force" is in everything and around everything. The difference is just the direction in which we are going. We are going moving vertically, as it were, to a higher level of existence - eventually god lies within us.

c) Our final destination, so to speak, is to become one with this spiritual essence.

3. The practical part of this? Look at the issue of the environment and particularly a group like PETA

a) When we understand transcendentalism, we can see why an organizations like PETA would be attractive to someone with this transcendental worldview. An animal and a man share a common spirit and all are of equal value and worth.

b) That's not to say that an organization might not attract folks like the evolutionist, but they come to such an organization for different reasons that flow out of their worldview.

(1) Evolutionist would disagree with the transcendentalist by denying there is anything really intrinsically worth saving, no spiritual essence that is being destroyed and that should be respected, but simply that nature, being a continuous "steam" of cause and effect, we must protect nature to protect the ecological balance.

(2) For example, if you kill too many animals of one kind or another, you upset the ecological balance in the universe that will alter the natural course of nature. Much of the climate change science rests on this belief system.

c) Christian might also join organization like PETA, but if so,

(1) they may not appreciate that the worldview that really undergirds a group like that is the antithesis of theism and Christianity, in particular, and

(2) they are adding strength and influence to a worldview that would seek to conquer and stamp out Christianity.

d) Christian who is engaged with some of those organizations probably comes to it because they blur the line of demarcation in the created order between man and the rest of nature and the relationship of man to God and the rest of nature to God.

(1) They rightly understand that man and animals and trees are all a part of nature, we're all creations or in a sense creaturely. So there is a sort of commonality with the rest of nature.

(2) BUT they lose sight of or minimize the importance of that fact that man is also a spiritual being and in relationship to the Creator in a different sort of way.

(3) Man does have a stewardship responsibility toward the rest of creation, but man's relationship to God and our understanding of the nature of God influences how we live out that stewardship responsibility that produces a different result.