

WTN U. Class Notes  
Lesson 10 11/20/13

I. Transcendentalism

a. Contributions

- i. Recognizes that ultimate reality is beyond the human categories of thought and language.
  1. Naturalism says that all truth we need to know can be uncovered by the scientific method
  2. Transcendentalism agrees with Theism that a complete understanding of the physical universe does not begin to exhaust the knowledge of the truth.
- ii. Recognizes that ultimate reality is not only beyond human understanding, but is also spiritual in nature. There is a "bond" between our own spiritual makeup and that which is ultimate reality. But that has its problems - how can you know?
- iii. Transcendentalism sees the unity of all creation. But that has its problems - how did we arrive at all the diversity we experience and observe?

b. Test of Reason

- i. Because Transcendentalism says that ultimate reality goes beyond human thinking, it is hard to evaluate.
  1. One of the tests of reason was the reliability of our sense perception.
  2. Transcendentalism avoids proof by saying that our senses aren't reliable because what is real is spirit that isn't observable.
- ii. Transcendentalist will disregard contradictions.
  1. Second test of reason was the Law of Non-Contradiction (something can't be and not be at the same time and in the same relationship)
  2. Transcendentalist will dismiss such criticism with comments like this one by Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, in his book, I Am the Gate: "It is not that the intellect sometimes misunderstand. Rather the intellect always

misunderstands. IT is not that the intellect sometime errs, it is that the intellect is the error."

3. But how can he know that his intellect is the error if he had to use his erring intellect even to make the statement?

iii. Transcendentalism has real epistemological problems - problems of how do we know what we know.

c. Test of the Outer World

i. The unity of Transcendentalism, that everything is a part of some ultimate "oneness" has no explanation for the diversity we observe.

1. Naturalism says it is random mutation and natural selection

2. Theism says it is because there is a creator

d. Test of the Inner World/Real World

i. With Naturalism, we said that it:

1. made life meaningless with no real purpose. Recall clip of William Provine

2. destroyed free will. Recall clip of William Provine

ii. With Transcendentalism, if everything is one (you may recall the chain of being philosophy we talked about early on - there is no "break" as in Theism between the Creator and the Creation and with Christianity, there is a "fall" which brings about another "break" between what is supposed to be and what is.

iii. Transcendentalism, like naturalism, has no "break" so it has no explanation for evil.

1. Evil is illusory.

a. Consider Shirley Maclaine: "Until mankind realizes that there is, in truth, no good and there is, in truth, no evil - there will be no peace."

b. This idea that there really is no ultimate distinction between good and evil doesn't "fit" with our experience.

2. Truth is personal, found within each of us.

a. Sounds nice

b. Provides no basis upon which to say that whatever anyone does is wrong. Torturing babies and killing them could be my inner truth and if there is no objective truth outside myself, then who can condemn me?

i. Recall again, naturalism does away with free will so there can be no moral culpability.

3. Places all authority in the individual, after all, how do you argue with god?

## II. Post-modernism

### a. Key Points.

i. There is no "larger story," nothing that unifies anything.

ii. There is no truth - any claim to knowledge is just social constructed, essentially a fabrication of the culture in which you live.

### b. Contributions

i. Has called the "bluff" of naturalist humanism that says that based on observation of the natural world and human reason we can find all the truth we need to know.

1. Recall, science can tell us how something works and what it is, but it can't tell us what we ought to do.

2. Post-modernism is helping pull down the pretension to knowledge that science has claimed for itself.

ii. Has reminded us of the power of culture to shape us.

### c. Test of Reason

#### i. Full of contradictions

1. Denies there is any "all encompassing story that applies to all people and at all times" which is its own story that it says applies to all people and at all times.

2. Says we're so trapped by our "cultural perspectives" that we can't know if there is any absolute truth. But of course, there own truth - that there is

no metanarrative or absolute truth - isn't culturally bound.

3. Stanley Fish (*Stanley Fish is a professor of humanities and law at Florida International University, in Miami. In the Fall of 2013, he will be Floersheimer Distinguished Visiting Professor at the Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law.*) "...Not only is there no one who could spot a transcendent truth if it happened to pass through the neighborhood, but it is difficult even to say what one would be like. Of course [one] would know what it would not be like; it would not speak to any particular condition, or be identified with any historical production, or be formulated in the terms of any national, ethnic, racial, economic, or class tradition."

a. Fish essentially says that somehow we can know truthfully what truth would not be like.

b. Why isn't this truth socially contingent or constructed? How does he know it isn't?

c. How was he able to access this truth?

ii. Test of the Inner/Outer World

1. While culture can certainly shape our views, it does not follow that reality itself is socially constructed.

2. Tends to place authority in the community, as opposed to where transcendentalism puts it, in the individual.

3. Squeezes out the individual; opens the door to "group rights" and statism

4. Meaning, if any, is only found in being in community.

a. Christians who stand against a monolithic, all-encompassing state are a threat to community.

d. "These matters, involving the most intimate and personal choices a person may make in a lifetime, choices central to personal dignity and autonomy, are central to the liberty protected by the 14th

Amendment. At the heart of liberty is the right to define one's own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life. Beliefs about these matters could not define the attributes of personhood were they formed under compulsion of the state."