

MEMORANDUM

Mr. Brodeway
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Bennington College
March 26, 1951

To: Students in Aspects of Romanticism

From: Mr. Belitt

I suggest that the class meet at the scheduled hour and place, during the period of my absence, and discuss together the indicated texts, under a system of rotating group leaders. It will be the function of the group leader to organize discussion around the interpretive problem, as she sees it, to invite and direct the exchange of opinion, and keep some record of the subject matter covered, and the attendance and participation of class members. The texts should be developed in the following order:

1. There Is No Natural Religion. Group Leader: Mallen Carpe
2. All Religions Are One. Group Leader: Lynn Fletcher
3. The Aphorisms of the "Laocoon." Group Leaders: Roselyn Karol
and Marcia Lang
4. On Homer. Group Leader: Fay Sigel

I. THERE IS NO NATURAL RELIGION

Analyze both the content and the developing phases of the argument carefully, for both its continuities and discontinuities. Read, in connection with it, "The Confession of a Savoyard Vicar" from Rousseau's Emile, as a credo of "natural religion." Note the dialectical character of the argument, in which two opposing propositions are turned upon one another to illuminate a truth which is the product of their opposition. Note that Blake is erecting a theory of knowledge -- of how perception comes about and creates a world that is not merely the sum total of organic sensations and natural objects perceived, but a constant act of imagination. Reconstruct as best you can, Blake's point of view, examining, on the one hand his hypothetical case "for" organic or natural perception; then his attempt to demonstrate its inadequacies and absurdities as a true account of human perception; and finally, in the second half (his rebuttal), his case for extra-sensory perception that does not merely report phenomena, but creates reality out of intuition, energy, and desire.

II. ALL RELIGIONS ARE ONE

Continue to develop Blake's theory of knowledge -- of how perceptions originate and manifest themselves -- implied in Blake's argument. What is the significance of his constant passion for unity in diversity, for Oneness among Many-ness? Was there evidence of a similar preoccupation in "There Is No Natural Religion"? How does Blake account for the seeming multiplicity of religious and philosophical sects behind the fundamental "oneness" of religion. What is the value of inspiration and prophecy for Blake and to what elements of the Hebraic tradition does he ally them?

III. THE APHORISMS OF THE LAOCOON

Note throughout the consistent transposition of values -- esthetic and creative, for religious and theological -- which these aphorisms seek to bring about. If it is true that Blake is "translating" the terminology of religious thinking into a credo for imaginative artists, what esthetic premises can you infer from this set of aphorisms? With what position does Blake identify the Old Testament tradition of prophecy? What is his attitude toward the tradition of Graeco-Roman classicism? Analyze the cumulative context for words like War, Money,