



## A Brief History of Classical Education

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### Lesson 8: Aristotle and Classical Education - Continued

#### Outline:

##### Aristotle's *Politics*

- The human is political.
- The polis is the community in which things are concretely shared between the members of that community, a certain way of life, and common ways of engaging in rule.
- Aristotle is not looking at what someone is at the beginning, but at the peak of their development.
  - The city is the most self-sustaining and independent form of organization.
  - There is something about living in a political community that allows a human being to fully actualize what it means to be human.
- Human beings are the rational animal, the living being possessed of speech.
  - *Speech might possess the living being.*
- If humans live virtuously and articulate the just, beautiful, and the good, this is humanities end.

##### Aristotle's *Ethics*

- We study ethics to be good.
- Early childhood education is extremely important.
- If a child is not raised well, it may be impossible for them to be virtuous.
- To understand virtue, we are looking to the rational parts of the soul (as distinguished from the irrational).

##### What are the conditions for virtue?

- One must have knowledge.
- One must act from a firm and steady character.
- We are able to choose the means to the end, but we never choose the end.
- For Aristotle, we are conditioned to think of the good in a certain way, which in turn changes the condition of our soul.
  - It is very useful to think about choice as a choice about what kind of human being you will become.
  - Someone can continue to make vicious choices, and that changes the soul and the very way that they think. A person can become so



twisted they really are not capable of virtue anymore. An example is a person who is fixated on domination of others.

What is virtue?

- *A virtue is a mean that avoids two extremes, one of deficiency and one of excess.*
- For Aristotle, the mean has more than one dimension.
  - A deficiency of courage is cowardice.
  - Excess of courage either is rashness or overconfidence.
  - The person who feels fear is capable of courage.
- There is a mean relative to each human person.

Distinction between a person who is truly virtuous and someone who is merely restrained

- The person who is moderate should not have any bad inclinations.
- The person who is restrained may have bad desires and they simply stop themselves.

Holistic virtues

- **Magnanimity** is the greatness of soul, this is the crown over all of their other virtues.
- Someone who is **just** obeys the law. Justice seems to focus on others and the way that we live with others.
- **Prudence** is living well as a whole.
  - This concerns how we attend to the common good and how we behave politically.
  - Prudence is the capacity by which we determine what the mean is.
- You need prudence to exercise any other virtue, but to have prudence you need to have all the other virtues.

How is one able to get outside of needing to be raised virtuous to be virtuous?

- Active life/contemplative life distinction.
  - Active life: focused on ethical virtues that concern actions
  - Contemplative life: focused on those virtues that lead to right thinking
- What does it really mean to actualize a virtue?
  - You are finally achieving that of which you are capable.
  - There is a pleasure of being in the activity of flourishing.
  - Someone is truly able to handle their fear, and have certain kind of calm.
- What is the end at which human beings are oriented?
  - Our end is virtue, which is actualizing our potential.
- There is something about contemplation that serves a role in helping someone become virtuous.



- Contemplation might actually help me to bring a community to virtue or restore virtue.

## Return to *Politics*

- The art of politics includes education, educating people how to live together virtuously.
- Poetry is a way of engaging the intellect in a way that elicits our passions to bring about harmony to the community in the face of the discord that inevitably arises.
- Classical education in particular is focused on scholé in a mode that is contemplative, which aims at virtue.
- We start to realize there is a beautiful order. Thinking in an orderly way is what gives us truth, acting in accordance with order is what makes us good human beings. All of these transcendental are deeply connected.
- Contemplation and the appreciation of the beautiful helps us to understand the true and morally good in philosophy and poetry and how these things must be complimented by what educators do every day.