



A Brief History of Classical Education

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Lesson 5: Leisure and the Beautiful

Outline:

What do we mean by a transcendental?

- Among the pagans a transcendental is understood as some kind of self-subsistent being, which is independent of us, and real.
- In the Christian perspective, beauty is predicated analogically of God, because we don't have full knowledge of God. God's beauty is far beyond any attributes that we possess.
- In the secular perspective, if beauty has any meaning at all, it is a transcendental, which means it is real, independent of our feelings and cultural norms.

What did the ancients think about leisure?

- The highest pleasure is from contemplation of the beautiful.
- Play is active and it may be oriented toward a goal beyond itself.
- Rest was a means to avoid restlessness.
- Leisure meant sitting down and seriously studying and appreciating something beautiful.
- Play and rest are really for the sake of activity.

What do moderns think about leisure?

- Entertainment is a way of learning things, but it is not the same as play.
- Entertainment can be very passive.
- We have replaced rest with restlessness (social media).
- Leisure is what we do on vacation and in retirement.
- The highest pleasure for moderns is what gives us the most intense pleasure.
- Work and drudgery are a means to vacation and retirement.

What is the beautiful?

- Ancient
 - Is everyone we are attracted to beautiful or can we be attracted to those who are not beautiful? If so, attractiveness and beauty cannot be acquainted.
- Modern confusion



- Beautiful as attractiveness, attractiveness concerns desire, which can sometimes be attracted to the beautiful, but sometimes not, so this is a confusions
- Confusing the beautiful with the mysterious - we don't fully abandon this, the beautiful might always have an element of beauty, but not everything mysterious is beautiful (there are many things we can't understand are ugly)
- Proportionality - comes close to ancient understanding of beautiful, we might apply this mathematically to art, when we reduce beauty to proportionality it is too dry, it doesn't capture the experience of the beautiful

How do we account for the fact that many people do seem to think that there are standards of beauty?

- Moderns think that high culture and manifestation of elite power structures subject the culture to standards of beauty.
- Ancients and medieval see manifestation of order in all things with a real look at nature, society, law, fashion, poetry, and architecture.
 - There is a power by which parts are related to a whole, but without destroying the independence of the parts.
 - Beauty is indeed real.
 - They saw that people had different judgements of what was beautiful, but at the same time they thought that while people have different judgements about things that does not mean that there isn't some underlying truth.

Why is it so important to reestablish Beauty as a transcendental?

- Historically, the belief that the beautiful is relative preceded the argument that the moral and the true are relative.

What is the beautiful?

- What is it that makes a face beautiful?
- Our mind tends to fill in order and harmony.
- Our perception of beauty is connected with awe.
- Harmony exists alongside tension, and there is something gratuitous about it. This particular arrangement doesn't have to be.
- Examples of beauty :
 - Stars - sense of deeper underlying order, scale and intensity of contrast
 - Dance - motion of body, change in postures of body over time, beauty that can't be captured in a moment



"The Dance Class"
Edgar Degas, 1874



- Music – chords relate parts and whole, but melody can only be understood through time
- Social custom/law - Martin Luther King Jr. sees deep diseases within the community, and thinks of how to restore it to a more harmonious relationship of parts with the whole

What would the ugly be? Is everything beautiful?

- Picasso depicted female body parts in the wrong arrangement. The shapes and color can be beautiful. This reminds us that there is a tension between the part and the whole. Even Picasso is trying to restore our understanding and appreciation of beauty.
- Something can be objectively beautiful, and not all will prefer it.
- There is a difference between things highly ordered and those not ordered at all.

The beautiful really isn't just a question of proportion (not just static).

- Beauty is a way of being.
- Human body has activities that maintain it in health. Maybe the activities are beauty (verb).
- In the beginning of a lecture we can be confused, but the argument can bring it together to a moment of distinct revelation. Engaging in the activity is beautiful. Bringing your mind and soul into a more orderly state of virtue and integrity is beautiful.

One of the first ways that we engage in the process of the activity of the beautiful, is the appreciation and production of works of art (according to Aristotle).