



A Brief History of Classical Education

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Lesson 9: Plato and Classical Education

Outline:

Plato's *Republic*

- Life aims at virtue.
- Each transcendental is independent, it is real.
 - It is troubling that each transcendental is self-subsistent, then they are not necessarily connected to the others.
 - Do we think the beautiful, the good, and the just are distinct?
 - Where is the true?

Plato sets the stage for understanding education.

- Contemplation and attending to the question of education and poetry can help or restore a community to virtue.
- There were basic problems that were facing Athens.
 - There was a problem of absentee parent educators.
 - War had killed off many parents.
 - There was a major plague afflicting Athens, literally the entire community was traumatized.
- Problem with the poets:
 - Accept the poets, or think that the poets are liars. Both lead to choosing a life of injustice.
 - How the poets came to understand Homer:
 - Sophists think Homer is not the maker of the shield, he is the maker of the image of the Cosmos.
 - Anyone who can invent a cosmology invents the world for those who are persuaded by it.
 - This is the heart of the problem of the sophists teaching.
- Justice is the advantage of the stronger. Might makes right.
 - When you look at the different kinds of regimes, there is someone who is stronger in each case (those who make the laws).
 - Prudence is the ability to render nations to oneself.
 - This understanding helps those who are not stronger to understand that they are being duped.

How should one read a Platonic text?

- Quick tips for reading a Platonic text:
 - What are the arguments?
 - How are the arguments made?



- Why does Socrates make the argument that he does?
- Look at the context of a Platonic text? Who is present? What is the purpose?
- Look at the order of the arguments? How do these challenge our presuppositions?
- Look at what is left out of the arguments.

What is the actual education that Socrates is offering?

- What is said?
- How Socrates speaks can be looked at.
 - We can learn how Socrates provokes a person to reveal something about themselves, and shifts the question away to criticize it in an abstract way, to get someone to see how something they think is wrong.
- Metalevels:
 - The *Republic* is a monologue given by Socrates to a listener. Is the listener Plato?
 - What was effect of Socrates on Plato? Plato wrote texts that feature Socrates.
 - Plato presents this to us.
 - We read the text.
 - We dialogue with ourselves.
 - We dialogue with others who are reading the texts.

Arguments in the Republic

- What is the right way to live one's life?
 - The focus is on justice.
 - He describes a one man, one job life for a healthy city.
 - There are no rulers.
 - The luxurious city becomes feverish.
- Three kinds of human beings
 - Bronze-souled people – those people who do not have extravagant desires to dominate others
 - Silver-souled person – someone for whom ambition is a driving factor, they want the things that other people have
 - Gold-souled person – these are ambitious and extremely smart
- Three parts of the soul
 - Bronze – desire or appetite
 - Silver – spiritedness
 - Gold – calculation
- The healthy city has only bronze souled people who do not want to oppress each other.
- The city becomes feverish with ambition, and needs a different kind of social order.
- Gold-souled people



- Because they are intelligent, they will naturally become leaders.
- If the gold-souled person goes wrong, everything goes wrong.
- If the gold-souled person goes right, everything might go a lot better.
- This teaching can become offensive as it gives a hierarchy of human beings.
- The bronze-souled people, with mild appetite, are naturally more virtuous. They don't have potential for enormous vice that the gold-souled people have.
- Gold-soul person is not the best person in this regime.

What kind of education is best for ambitious people?

- Educators need to look to theology and understand what is conducive to virtue or not.
- Romans looked at gymnastic as vanity (to beautify body), but Socrates says gymnastic is really for the soul (discipline).
- It is important to gauge the education offered by balancing music and gymnastic.

The just, the beautiful, and the good

- These seem to be distinct at the political level.
- The healthy city is the just city. There are not any rulers.
- There are some societies where you can make concessions to equality and privacy.
- Others societies need authority structures.
- Different kinds of political orders are more suited to different kinds of peoples.
- Different children turn out quite differently, even in the same family. It is important to adapt the teaching to the nature of the child and the order of the soul that you want to encourage.
- When a ruler tells what a right place is, they interfere with family life (libertarian).