



A Brief History of Classical Education

Dr. Matthew Post

Lesson 7: Aristotle and Classical Education - Continued

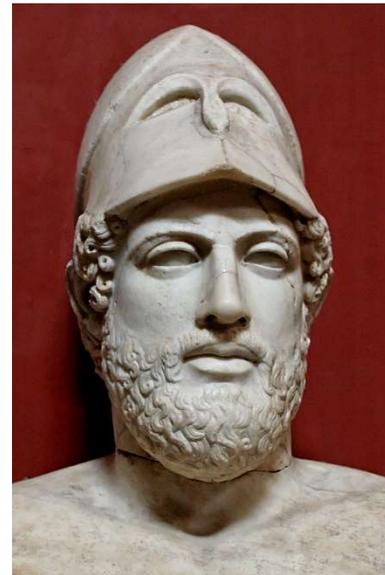
Outline:

Aristotle's Metaphysics

- Aristotle is very tentative with everything he says.
- Metaphysics literally means the scrolls that came after the scrolls discussing physics.
- There is a deeper meaning of metaphysics.
 - First philosophy
 - An inquiry into the first things
- The beginning of these inquiries is wonder (which Aristotle learned from Plato).

How did philosophy become real for the ancients?

- They were attracted to how extraordinary things are.
- There was inquiry into the cause of the good and the beautiful and being and becoming.
- Aristotle links beauty to order, the good and the beautiful are the beginning, both of the knowledge and of the movement of many things.
- The good and the beautiful do not depend upon anything else.
- These are real, they're not in the eye of the beholder.
 - Aristotle likens the distinction between beautiful and ugly as that between good and sour.
 - Usually if someone says something tastes sweet that is sour, it is because they are sick and their tastes change.
 - When you're trying to understand the proper judgment of things, you have to look at how a healthy person judges them.
- If you want a standard of beauty, you have to look at what does not change (the same in all places at all times).
- Aristotle concludes that what is behind the heavens is not a power.
- Aristotle is aiming at the primary unmoved mover.



Bust of Pericles, Roman copy after Greek original, 430 BC



Some terminology of Aristotle

- Four causes - In Greek, a cause means being responsible for something being what it is.
 - Example: A sculptor in ancient Athens making a statue of Pericles.
 - Efficient cause - sculptor makes the statue
 - Material cause – marble
 - Formal cause – form is form of Pericles
 - Final cause - purpose is to honor Pericles.
- Potency and actuality
 - Potency - huge block of marble has potentiality to be shaped into the sculpture, marble has many other potentialities, a child has the potential to become an adult (actuality)
- Analogy - Each thing that we look at has a form, but that form itself is not a cause.
 - When trying to figure out what the primary unmoved mover is, we want to talk about something that is real, not something that seems real (analogically or in the imagination).

If we think of flesh as matter and soul as form, can we think of the flesh as potency and the soul as actuality?

- Think about movement from potency to actuality, the soul is the principle by which we move, and is the principle of life.
- When the soul is gone, the movement from potency to actuality ceases. Movement is made possible by the soul.

When we think about causes, can we distinguish between internal and external?

- The sun is an external efficient cause in farming. The interior motion of the seed growing into the plant or into the crop would be an internal cause, and the sun from which it draws energy is an external cause.

Ways in which modern/contemporary philosophers might attack Aristotle.

- Materialists say the soul can exist without the body (form without matter). They deny that there is form, and the only thing that exists are particles. Any higher order pattern is an invention of the mind and an abstraction that makes it easier for us to deal with reality.
- Others reject the distinction between external and internal. Even though from big picture perspective, what is happening in plant and seed is an internal cause, and sun is external cause, when they think about chains of causality they conclude that at some point all of these external causes were responsible for the fact that we have seeds in the first place.
 - There is cause and effect and nothing else.
- To deny that there are any patterns, and to deny that these patterns have reality is problematic. As soon as you grant there are patterns, you grant that there is form (Aristotle).



Aristotle's understanding of the primary unmoved mover.

- Being-ness and being is understood in many ways (substance).
- Three major kinds of substance:
 - Matter and form and moving cause;
 - The relationship between parents and children;
 - First cause of all reality as we know it is the primary unmoved mover.
- In any process of change, there has to be something that is not changing underneath it.
- When Aristotle looks at the world, virtually everything was changing, so there is thought that there is something primary and ultimate that is unchanging.
- Is the primary unmoved mover potency or act?
 - For potency, the child begins as potency and then they become an adult.
 - Aristotle claims that the primary unmoved mover is act, because actuality of potency is what is necessary to make the child possible.
 - Whatever emerges later, must actually be there in the beginning.

Is Aristotle denying creation out of nothing?

- Aristotle does not think that what came first is a potency.
- Aristotle is saying that the Cosmos exists.
- If the Cosmos is accidental, then we cannot have a rational analysis of it.
- If we can't have a rational analysis of it, then why are we inquiring of it at all?
- If God has free will and freely creates out of love, then the created order could have been or not been, so in that sense everything is miraculous or an act of grace (different terminology for accident). Augustine and Aquinas argue along these same lines.
- Maybe we can look at the soul as being the locus for potency to act.

Primary unmoved mover is analogically akin to the beautiful.

- Desire and thought are moved toward the beautiful.
- You have to imagine two major categories
 - Primary unmoved mover
 - All the things moved by the primary unmoved mover
 - This contradicts Christian theology.
 - What God creates does not exist independent of God.
 - It makes sense that without revelation Aristotle would not posit this a creation dependent on God.
- It is as though everything that pre-exists in the Cosmos is moved by love, motion which causes it to be orderly from stars, to planets, to Earth, to our lives.
 - It is asked of us, as Christians that we respond to God's love with love.
- Primary unmoved mover has to be understood as intellect (nous).
- Everything that has matter is changeable.



- If there is one thing that never undergoes change, then it doesn't have matter.
- Nous is the primary thing that doesn't have matter.
 - If all of the activity of the primary unmoved mover is actuality not potency, the most continuous activity of humans is thinking.
 - Nous is also most pleasant. Nous is life.
- What is the primary unmoved mover thinking about? It is only thinking about itself.
 - The primary unmoved mover may be good and beautiful.

How is the good and beautiful manifest in being and becoming?

- According to Aristotle, you cannot think there is anything contrary to the first cause. If primary unmoved mover is good and beautiful, then everything else is ugly and bad. Saint Augustine rejects this.
- Aristotle says that only things that have matter are subject contraries. The order itself cannot be said to be ugly.
- The good and the beautiful concerns the order of the parts within the whole.
- Is there a way to distinguish the good and the beautiful?
 - The good refers to conduct.
 - The beautiful can be attributed to things that are static (statue).
 - Mathematics has a great deal to tell us about the beautiful.

Ultimately, Aristotle never quite says that the primary unmoved mover is beautiful and good.