



Common Arts Education with Christopher Hall

Lecture 2: The History of the Common Arts

Outline:

The History of the Common Arts

- Ancient Greeks and Romans
 - Socrates talks about the common arts in the Republic pejoratively.
 - What makes these common arts base for Socrates is the exchange of money for these crafts.
 - The Romans adopted much of the same attitude with a few exceptions:
 - “Let us consider trade and other occupations. Which one befits a gentleman and which are beneath him, we have generally been taught as follows. First, any occupation is to be rejected if it incurs public ill-will, such as tax-collecting and usury. Also unfit for gentleman are those jobs done by hired workmen, whom we pay for manual labor only and not for artistic skill. Their very wage is token of their slavery. We also consider vulgar those who buy from wholesale agents to see at retail. They would make no profit without a good deal of outright lying, because there can be nothing liberal about a workshop...”
 - “But those professions that call for a higher level of intelligence and which confer some benefit on society, such as medicine and architecture, are proper for those whose social position they become. Commerce on a small scale is contemptible...But of all occupations by which gain is secured, none is better than agriculture. None is more profitable, delightful, or becoming a free man.” – Cicero, “De Officiis”
 - In Cicero, we begin to see a shift between the cosmopolitan Greeks and the cosmopolitan Romans.
- Medieval
 - In Hugh of Saint Victor we can find the notion of the book of nature (a general revelation).
 - How do we find God’s original goodness in those orders – the growing of good food, making of good bread, and the weaving of good cloth?
 - Bonaventure was also bringing the common arts back to the front.
- Scientific Revolution/Industrial Revolution
 - Good glass workers, brass workers, and metal workers of all kinds were using their skills to produce instruments for better measures and data.



- Industrialization caused a bifurcation between blue and white collar work.
- By the time we got back from World War II, we even got away from the victory garden. It was now easy to go to the supermarket and store and refrigerate food.
- We lost common arts through our schooling and through our lives at home.
 - We've lost track of the importance of those skills and lost a little bit of our touch with the realities behind him.
- John Milton describing the ideal education in the 1600s:
 - “And having those passed the principles of arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and geography, with a general compact of physics, they may descend in mathematics to the instrumental science of trigonometry, and from thence to fortification, architecture, engineering, and navigation...To set forward all these proceedings in nature and mathematics, what hinders that they may procure, as oft as shall be needful, the helpful experiences of hunters, fowlers, fishermen, shepherds, gardeners, apothecaries...And this will give them such a real tincture of natural knowledge, as they shall never forget, but daily augment with delight.” – John Milton, “Of Education”
 - He proposes the reintegration of the liberal arts and the common arts to raise the kind of young men who can meet not only the demands of war, but also the demands of peace.
 - He also brings in the fine arts.
 - “Only I believe that this is not a bow for every man to shoot in, that counts himself a teacher; but will require sinews almost equal to those which Homer gave Ulysses...” – John Milton, “Of Education”