



David Hicks: Commentary on Hospitality, Education History, and Classical Architecture

Lesson 2: David's Relationship with Classical Education

Outline:

What is your own professional history with classical education?

- At the time David penned *Norms and Nobility* in the 1970s, he had no working knowledge of classical (Christian) education or homeschooling.
- The basis for the book provided a critique of both public and private secondary schools at that time calling for a return to a more traditional form of learning.
- Based on his study of schools while at the same time reading ancient literature, David concluded that we had veered away from the traditional path of education (norms) and the formation of virtuous citizens (nobility). Both needed to come back as the basis of education for society.
- Schools effectively lowered educational goals by reducing the human experience to a utilitarian focus.
- As a result of the book being published, David's criticisms combined with talk about classical education are now mainstream.
 - David humbly admits he is not an insider of the classical movement having never headed up a "classical" school. Rather, he sees his involvement in education all his life as case studies where he put into practice the criticisms of his book.
- For all the healthy progress tied up with the classical movement, David notes the generality of meaning it implies at times.
- Education in the classical sense begins with reading and understanding the ancient world and allowing its impact to test the character of a person.

What were the classical elements in your own education?

- David's educational formation included personal connections with dedicated and loving teachers, great books, and a healthy dose of a competitive spirit.
- The Bible was studied in his parochial school not for religious instruction but as a means of learning close reading, focusing on and understanding the meaning or argument of a text.
- David continued his practice of close reading under the influence of particular professors during his collegiate years. Sadly, the practice of close reading has gone out of fashion in the universities at large.



- The demise of the university system and its imperceptible commitment to classical texts combined with the classical movement in this country makes for very strange times.
- Given the incompatibility of these two realities, David argues that if a student graduates from a rigorous classical school, they “should go right into whatever life...will build the whole man or woman.”

What is at the heart of a classical education?

- Classical education takes as the order of first importance that we live in a moral universe.
- And the first business of that education is to introduce students to writing and to thinking that introduces them to a moral universe.
- This teaches students how to negotiate the universe in a way that protects them and others, so that they can thrive in the true, the good, and the beautiful.
- Developing a young person’s character and conscience is the heart of why we educate students at all.
- What’s more, a sense of style is found in people who live beautiful lives and who express things elegantly and want to create beauty wherever they go.
 - This is an increasingly difficult task for a society seized by the habit of “de-norming” everything.
 - Contrariwise, the idea that virtue as a habit means doing the right thing unthinkingly.
- At the end of the day, the heart of classical education is developing in students a moral sensibility and aesthetic sense of style with a view to creating beauty (to the extent one is able) where a belief in God is the ground for all those things.