



Disability and Classical Education: Student Formation in Keeping with Our Common Humanity with Dr. Amy Richards

Lecture 2: The Classical Difference

Outline:

The Classical Difference, Telic Attention and the Purpose of Education

- The difference of disability could be a blessing rather than merely a burden.
- We need to consider disability as a strange vocation.
- Classical education places us in the context of the great economy and understands that true human formation can only occur when we understand our telos in our little economies.
- **Telic attention** always keeps in view our place in the great economy.

Vocation

- To take up a vocation is to respond to call to (in Pieper's words), "become what we already are."
- A vocation is to strive towards our telos.
- We are beings endowed with freedom to enter into relationships of mutual self-gift with one another and together participate in the true, the good, the beautiful, and the holy.

Strange Vocation

- What does it mean that disability is a strange vocation?
- Disability, in the ways that it stands out from the experiences of others, can give specific shape to individual circumstances in a way that is out of the ordinary. This strangeness can lead to wonder. We can understand it as a gift rather than problem to be solved.
- Disability serves as a call to see things differently.
- Our first response must be to listen and to enter into relationship.
- Our vocation is given to us from without than conjured up from within.

We are on a quest to see disability differently.

- First, this desire to welcome all kinds of learners is not a secondary matter in education.



- Second, if there a connection between seeing and doing, then classroom strategies and techniques will not do us good if we do not see the good of welcome.
- There is a need for a change of heart.
- Changing our vision is hard work. We cannot change ourselves at will because we cannot simply will ourselves to see differently. What we see determines what we can do.
- How could we learn to see differently? We come to see differently through acts of attention. We look, desire, and act all at once. Our freedom consists in our capacity to direct our attention.
- If I do not believe that disability might be part of my vocation, I will not see it as something that can be accepted and explored, but only as something to mourn and to resist.
- True attention to the other requires us to look at another without thought of the self.
- Wonder is the gateway to our vocation. The opening that attention makes for wonder calls us towards the other in and through love.
- Our vocation to self-gift turns out to be a vocation to attend well.
 - All true attention is telic attention.
 - It is attention to the other as the kind of thing it is.
 - The practice of telic attention to others is partially constitutive of our telos.
 - What we attend to and how we attend to it speaks volumes about what we find most important about how we order our loves.

Classical Education can be defined by its cultivation of telic attention.

- In instrumentalizing our attention, modern education draws us away from our telos and encourages a disordering of our loves and our lives.
- What kind of attention do our educational institutions practice themselves and cultivate in their students?
- Why is this kind of attention cultivated?
- What view of the human person is implied by these forms of attention?
- Along which metrics do we define success in school or in life?
- Is school connected only with one part of life, or with an integrated conception of life as a whole?
- To understand the contrast between instrumental attention and telic attention more fully, we need to consider not only the object of our attention but also the quality of attention.
- Classical education begins with an understanding of the whole human person as defined by our telos. To educate classically requires that we cultivate telic education.
- To pay telic attention to our students requires us to see them in the context of the whole lived environment in which and through which we form them.



A strange vocations model of disability

- Our question is, “How do we see the gift of the person with disabilities and learning differences in light of the great economy?”
- It is telic attention for which students with disabilities and learning differences and their families are most hungry.
- We all hunger for attention that sees us as the whole person that we are.
- When we exclude persons with disabilities from our learning communities we are left with a curriculum that offers a misleading understanding of truth, an incomplete narrative of the possibilities of goodness, and a picture of beauty that fails to witness to the ultimate beauty of our shared vulnerability.

So how do we cultivate telic attention?

- Two lenses:
 - View the world through a pair of metaphorical (metaphysical) bifocals.
 - The distance lens focuses on our human telos.
 - Through the near lens we focus on the details of the subject, the particular human being before us.
 - We can fail to see them and constantly attempt to bend them to the cult of normalcy.
- Two principles:
 - Order
 - Distance lens: Order is tied to beauty. Classical education seeks out this order for wonder.
 - Through the near lens, order provides the key principle for shaping our immediate classroom environment.
 - Joy flows from order.
 - If we are looking for joy, this kind of order is not the same thing as rigidity.
 - Love
 - Near lens: We love the individual student in front of us.
 - Distance lens: Loving her requires us to train her loves.
 - We might see the entire task of classical education as an extended exercise in telic attention with the purpose of ordering our loves.