



How to Teach History with Wes Callihan

Lesson 2: History and the Liberal Arts

Outline:

A review of why we study history

- We cannot study the past, we study the records and witnesses to the past.
- We have written records, material remains, and oral traditions.
- What kind of thing is history? What are the various sub genres? We need to know what kinds of things these things are in order to know what questions to ask.
- Why would we study history? If we study history, we can know something about who we are (cultural history can explain who we are as a people). History is a study of our roots (what did we grow out of).
- We ought to understand ourselves.



The principle of the liberal arts

- The liberal arts are those studies that the Western tradition has identified as the best for making a human being what we ought to be. They help us to achieve our chief end.
- The liberal arts are studied by a free (liberated) people, who are not tied by working with their hands.
- The liberal arts free us. We have to learn that we are not God; we need to be freed from narrowmindedness.
- The liberal arts are classified into the Trivium and the Quadrivium. The liberal arts are primarily to teach us virtue.

Virtues must be cultivated—because we are not born virtuous

- The process of education includes arts that help us to become more virtuous (classical virtues and supernatural virtues).
- The liberal arts teach us wisdom and virtue through the contemplation of goodness, truth, and beauty.

History and the cultivation of virtue and character: the testimony of Plutarch, Thucydides, Livy



- History is behind the seven liberal arts.
- History serves the purpose of giving us moral examples, examples that show us how virtue and vice are embodied.
- Plutarch is famous for writing about the lives of famous Greeks and Romans. Plutarch says that he is giving character sketches. The little things are often far more illuminating than great deeds.
 - In the picture of Alexander, we can see what we ought to be.
 - When we read about the lives of virtuous men, there something about the way the soul is made. It is in the nature of the case for men to struggle after virtue.
 - We still have the nature God gave us, and Jesus comes to restore the nature He gave us. There is a part of us that still longs for virtue.
- **History senses a moral purpose.**
- Thucydides is writing as an essay for all time for those people who understand that the future will reflect the past. There is one thing in history that never changes, and that is human nature (humans will be tempted to cowardice, corruption, and abuse).
- Livy, in his history of Rome, says, “History is the best medicine for a sick mind; for in history you have a record of the infinite variety of human experiences plainly set out for all to see; and in that record you can find for yourself and your country both examples and warnings; fine things to take as models, base things, rotten through and through to avoid.”
 - History is medicine for a sick mind. The kind of sickness is the sickness of heart of mind that cultural conservatives see seep away.
 - How did people pull out of the downhill slide? How did individuals survive to the next age? How did people deal with the terrible problems of the past?

Aristotle on wisdom

- Aristotle says that wisdom is like the art of an architect.
- The architect has the arts rendering of what the job should look like at the end. He brings in the tradesmen in the correct order.
- Aristotle says wisdom is the art of judging and ordering rightly in order to achieve our final end (Aquinas).
- Aristotle says happiness is the chief end of man.
- I am to build my life because He is at work in me.

History gives us a perspective that leads to wisdom.

- Everything in our life is for the purpose of arriving at God in the end.
- The study of history is an essential background for the liberal arts because it gives us wisdom.