



## The Liberal Arts Tradition with Dr. Kevin Clark and Ravi Jain

### Lesson 5: Gymnastic and Music

#### Outline:

*“A man who won’t submit himself the laws of prudence when walking on ice will submit himself to the laws of nature.”*

G.K. Chesterton

#### Gymnastic and Music

- Tuning hearts and training bodies. Two pre-critical means of preparing students to acquire the arts, to become philosophers, to love wisdom and to know truth.
- Their growth in love and ordering of loves is bound up in students being embodied beings.
- There is an implicit Gnostic view in classical education.
  - The Christian classical forbearers understood humans to be body and soul made in the image of God with bodies, souls, and affections.

#### Gymnastic

- Piety, gymnastic, and music are foundational at first and continue to provide the foundation for all other learning.
- As composite, embodied beings, any use of reason is going to be bound with the body.
- Aristotle: Imagine someone trying to exercise courage who has never done anything difficult or painful with their body. They would shrink in fear not knowing what it was like.
  - Students learn lessons of endurance or meeting challenges playing sports. Those are echoes of an ancient insight that at the root of virtue is training bodies.
- **The most important work that Christian classical educators need to do is to understand the central role that gymnastic education played in all previous education.**
- Before people can have moral or intellectual virtue, they have to master their body.
- We live in a culture that is dominated by sports and athletics. Yet we fail to understand the deep intellectual and moral foundations that gymnastic education provides.
  - We tend to deprecate manual labor and exalt intellectual vocations. Sports are a very embodied vocation. There is bifurcation of intellectual stuff and embodied gymnastic stuff separate.



- How do you train those aesthetic judgements? When you look back, you see that people were engaged with reality. People were participating in the exploration of the real.
  - The students who could understand the physics were curious. They had play experiences. The students who had a broader experience of reality through play and embodied experience were more curious about the explanations for those things. The priority for the younger students was to give them embodied experiences that brought them to wonder.
  - *Our children are not having enough experiences in nature, students need to be in nature.*
  - Natural history was all about encounters with nature.
- **Gymnastic is embodied piety.**
  - How is fasting connected to spirituality? If I can master a natural physical desire toward a spiritual end of communion with God, how much more will that build up the ability to say no to sinful desires.
  - **Mastery of the body is for embodied piety.**
- The idea of being called into play:
  - We talk about people being in the game. Stop thinking about who is in the stands. There is a habit of being able to be fully engaged in what you are doing.
  - This is the character of understanding truth. Get into it. Ask questions of the book and expect to hear answers from it.
  - Children that have many experiences with embodied nature recognize the limits of the way we do physics or biology in the classroom.
    - There is mystery and wonder all over, *if the students are engaged without layers of electronic mediation.*
  - In the gymnasium, one of the key exercises was wrestling. Later they would wrestle with ideas.
  - In gymnastic education you realize that you do not stand or fall alone. What might that mean in moral virtue and intellectual virtue?
    - What does it mean to wrestle together in academic contexts? Does that create unity?
- The lesson that student learns in piety with respect to their coach is something that can be transferred to an author.
  - I will submit myself to a coach, even in difficult things.
  - In the same way I will come to literature and mathematics teachers, and I will submit myself to the exercises that are given. This leads to freedom and self-mastery.
  - We have to learn to fit ourselves into nature/reality. How do I respect the integrity of what nature is?
  - Ken Myers notes that there is a **reinterpretation of what dominion means** between the 12<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries: coming out of the Scientific Revolution it tends to mean **power over** rather than a **cultivation of the inherent possibilities within**.

- “A man who won’t submit himself the laws of prudence when walking on ice will submit himself to the laws of nature.” G.K. Chesterton
- Basic gymnastic education makes me realize that I have limits, and I am dependent upon other people. What seed of intellectual and moral virtue would that recognition be?

Gymnastic education is an education for embodied humanity. It is a recognition that we are composite beings. This is the way that we are made and it is very good. Paying attention to that will have drastic consequences morally, spiritually, and intellectually.



Gymnastic and Music  
by Matthew Clark