



Teaching Modern Political Philosophy

with Joshua Gibbs

Lesson 13: The Impossibility of Secular Society by Rémi Brague

Outline:

The Impossibility of Secular Society by Remi Brague

- It will probably take students a long while to accept Brague's account of what an aristocratic society is.
- Brief summary:
 - The term secular society is redundant.
 - The existence of a secular realm necessarily speaks of something beyond a secular realm.
- The biggest logical problems with the concept of pure secularity:
 - Beyond the four generation limit, a man can have no concrete definite relationship with anyone (besides a speculative relationship). This is society. Society is the people who are playing the game.
 - For the game to be fair it must be secular.
- What are the limits of a democratic arrangement from a monarchical position?
 - There are limits to the nature of any game. There are only certain actions which the players of a game can consent to. If a player of a game does not have a right outside of the game to do something then he does not acquire the right to do that in deciding to play the game.
 - A democracy lacks the power to put anyone to death and declare war. We can only surrender the rights that we have to others.
 - How do you give someone else the right to kill you if you don't have the right to kill yourself?
 - The power to put to death comes directly from God. Unless God can be invoked in the power of the government a democracy is incapable of describing where the government's power to kill comes from.
 - The goal in a social contract is to not need to invoke outside help.
 - Rousseau's explanation of this is rather fascinating.
 - He says you are capable of risking your life to preserve it. When a man enters into the social contract it is a calculated risk that you take. You will be better off in society than out of it.
 - At the point a man believes his chances are better outside of society than within it, he would be crazy not to exit society.
 - Society is a calculated risk. Society is not good in and of itself.
- Is society good? Is government good? This is a theological question. It is based on where government comes from.



- If government is not good in and of itself then government does not exist apart from sin.
- If you conceive of government as a necessary evil it tends to make itself all the more necessary and all the more evil.
- If you conceive of government as good then you can make government live up to its good nature.
- The conservative position is that government is good because God created the government. The original society is a divine human society. There is a government that preexists man.
- The idea that government is unnecessary in an unfallen world is an American aberration of conservative tendencies.
- If government is divine, then the divine voice of government can situate itself outside of society and testify to society that it is good for man to exist.
- If the playing field is merely flat, the game can't be pronounced good because there is no objective place to stand from outside whereby to view it.
- It is the Christian conviction that it is good to be here. Then man must live in such a way to perpetuate his place on the earth.
- In Burke's view, the natural world must be connected with the supernatural world. The secular world must be connected to the sacred world. There must be some voice capable of speaking from outside of society about what the point of society is.
- The dead are the metaphysical custodians of the unborn (not born for many years). Respect for the unborn goes with a respect for the dead. Neither of these people have any direct bearing on our lives. The unborn are the ones who will pay attention to what you thought is best.
- You must lay an example for your children on how the past ought to be respected if you want your children to respect you. If you want your children to care for you, you have to give them an example to follow. (Burke)
- If we think of society as a game, games tend to be more fun when there is a comfortable/convenient number of people. Too many people means that other people place desires on the game. How hard is it to get ten people to agree on the rules of the game?
 - This is why progressives tend to allow for eugenics, abortion, and euthanasia because more people make the game harder to play. Control the number of people who play the game.
 - You are only trapped if you think of society as a game.
- Brague asks what makes human beings beget children.
 - No society will endure if some people don't look farther than one century, if some don't look beyond the secular realm.
 - We must see beyond the game.
 - Society is pronounced good by one who sits outside of society and grants his goodness to society.