



PHILOSOPHICAL THERAPY: RETURNING TO FIRST PRINCIPLES – A MEDICINE AGAINST MODERNITY

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CLASS #3: HOW SHOULD WE LIVE?

What is liberty?

- Freedom from constraint or freedom to do what is right?
- Which comes first – The self and its rights, or the Good?
- Our assumptions about the state and about the human person and human liberty are intertwined.

Aristotelian/Classical Political Philosophy

- “Every state is a community of some kind, and every community is established with a view to some good...” (from his *Politics*)
- “Every art and inquiry, and similarly every action and intentional choice, is held to aim at some good.” (from his *Nicomachean Ethics*)
- The four causes: final, formal, efficient, material
- The comprehensive human good: *eudaimonia* (an activity of the soul in accordance with virtue)
- The classical political philosophical tradition:
 - The city is for the good of the people.
 - The good of the people is about virtue, since the highest goods are goods of the soul.
 - Reason rules over the passions.
 - The political community is natural, but we do not come to what is natural “by nature” – we need training in virtue to achieve our excellence.
 - Families are the basic unit of society.
 - Pluralism is a problem.

Liberal Political Philosophy

- Thomas Hobbes:
 - The right replaces the good. What is the ultimate guide of political action? Not the good, but the right that is born from the necessity of fleeing evil.
 - Legitimate authority is not honorific; there are no politically relevant forms of excellence.
 - Political life is unnatural.
 - The state exists to protect what is natural and fundamental – the desiring human individual. The individual, not the family, is the basic unit.
- John Locke:
 - Rejects Hobbes' political solution, *but on the basis of Hobbes' principles*.
 - Morality is natural, but not based on natures or knowable final ends; the state is artificial.
 - Natural rights without natural law.
- John Rawls:
 - The original position, behind a "veil of ignorance." Justice as fairness.
 - The self is prior to ends. We are defined first by our capacity for choice, not by our ends as human beings.
 - (Related to Kant's "categorical imperative": Act only according to that maxim whereby you can, at the same time, will that it should become a universal law.)

Autonomous vs. Narrative Conceptions of Personhood

- The impossibility of neutrality as to ends

Recommended Reading:

Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (if you like to read philosophy)

Michael Sandel, *Justice: What is the Right Thing to Do?*

Patrick J. Deneen, *Why Liberalism Failed*

Rod Dreher, *The Benedict Option*

