

On Learning and Wisdom

Artful Prudence | 2 August, 2021 | by Artful Prudence



Note: as of recent, I have been sending out emails almost regularly and I have been receiving a stream of positive, even flattering feedback on how they have impacted your personal life.

It is in my right to precede today's piece with a heartfelt **thank you** to all of you who have supported, contributed and shared my work, your generosity and good heart makes it all the more pleasant to serve you through my writing.

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Body

Men whose words are thoughtful yet actions improper are distasteful. We are so hurried in asking the usual questions: whether one can speak this language or that, or write poems, or recite a piece of history, or interpret something profound, or clarify a quirky idea. Yet the most significant question is the last to be attended to; namely, whether man has been made better and wiser. We shall discover, then, who has the foremost *understanding*, not who has lots of it. So, the more abundant our souls, the more they enlarge.

It is no surprise that neither the expert nor the student grow more apt despite knowing more. It is the attitude with which we get to grips with the sciences that is inapt and brings rise to baseness. In point of fact, the supervision of our parents is directed towards equipping our brain with knowledge, letting pass the weight of merit and discernment. In Montaigne's words, "judgement can do without knowledge: but not knowledge without judgement." Knowledge is menacing in a feeble hand which can't command it. Not only retarding the master, but hurting him. Even worse, the students and their tasks are not nurtured and strengthened by their learning. It is handed around with one aim in sight. The aim being affectation and show, as if it were a handy token for amassing and creating assertions, yet having no higher utility.

What we do is tend to others' judgements and learning, failing to reform it to our good. We bear similarity to a man who, longing for a fire, moves to his neighbour to get a spark, then stays there having noticed a large glare to warm him, neglecting his home and its gloom. What value is there in having a full stomach if we don't assimilate the food? If we are not inwardly transformed, if we are not fortified and enlarged, we have put in more than we have absorbed. Hence, it confirms that we have been taught how to talk with everyone except ourselves. We acquired knowledge of copious theory, but how many are able enough to use it? Cicero said, 'We do not need talk but helmsmanship.' As erudite as we may be with another's bent, it is our own wisdom that makes us wise. We assent to rest and depend so decisively and to excess on another's weaponry that we tear down our might. He was meant to arrive home with a richer soul but he returns with a bloated one. He filled it with air rather than enrich it with power.

"I hate a sage who is not wise for himself."

Euripides

Dionysius found it comical that professors who read up on the unpleasant features of Ulysses knew nothing of their flaws. Their flutes were congruous but their ethics discordant; speakers talking of justice

yet not being themselves just. Wisdom must be benefited from, not merely acquired. As Cicero remarks, 'We must not only obtain Wisdom: we must enjoy her.' There is nothing to be lost if they don't instruct you how to properly think and act. Knowledge is not solely to be glued to your spirit – this is pseudo practice. It ought to be embodied and absorbed; the soul infused and marinated with knowledge, not heedlessly drizzled.

“Now that so many are learned, it is good men that we lack.”

Seneca

Learning casts no understanding on a lacking soul. It will not confer sight to the imperceptive. Its function is to instruct his judgement rather than grant him the ability to see. To see clearly is not to see straight. Man discerns the good but doesn't conform to it, he perceives knowledge but fails to wield it. Agesilaus was once asked what children ought to be taught, he replied, 'What they should do when they are grown up.' Further, when he encouraged Xenophon to have his boys raised in Sparta, it was neither for rhetoric nor argumentation, but to learn the most worthy discipline there is: 'how to obey and how to command.'

The Combat between Aeneas and Turnus, by Milani

In the *Republic*, the principal law is to assign the citizens responsibilities based on their temperament. According to Plato, their firstborn son in the regal descent was hardened to a stern and high-principled training. Following his emergence, he was handed over to eunuchs rather than women: owing to their righteousness, they held the foremost power in the king's court. They too were at the helm of cultivating his physical state. When the boy turned seven, they trained him in riding and hunting. When he turned fourteen, they entrusted him to four noble men; the most sagacious, the most fair-minded, the most restrained and the most courageous. The first man instilled faith, the second truthfulness, the third discipline and the fourth fearlessness.

“Whose minds are made by Titan with gracious art and from a better clay.”

Juvenal

The Persians desired to abbreviate the expedition. Proper study can only educate us on what wisdom, heroic deeds and strength of will comprise, but they ventured to place their youngsters in direct contact with truth, with reality, instructing them not merely by idle talk but by diligent evaluation, forcefully shaping their nature by acts and precedents over word and tenet. The soul shall not merely know wisdom, it shall be its essential character: an ingrained mark rather than a thing obtained. Those firm youth loathed subjection of any kind except that of merit and goodness, thus furnished not with masters of art, but masters of wisdom, bravery and fairness, as stated in Plato's *Laws*. Their system of instruction embraced raising questions about men's verdicts and acts. Whether by censure or commendation, the students had to give grounds for their assertions, in doing so they honed their intellect and acquired a knowledge of what is just and correct.

They were accustomed to move to Grecian towns searching for orators, musicians and painters, while others to Sparta for generals, political leaders, and law-givers. In Athens, you learn to speak rightly; in Sparta, to act rightly. The former to untangle and solve specious reasoning and disregard the sanctimony of deviously entwined words, the latter to extricate themselves from the pitfalls of indulgence and honourably despise the threats of fate and death. While the Athenians were engaged with the constant teaching of language, the Spartans were engaged with the constant teaching of spirit. In military rule, instances demonstrate that learning the arts and sciences softens and effeminizes men's core rather than instruct them to be dense and prepared for battle and bloodshed.

