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Democratie, deugden, docentschap: de docent als gids in de democratie

Wiersma, J.K.C.

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Summary in English for “Democratie, deugden en docentschap”

Legal philosophy requires reflection on the ends of law and politics. Accordingly, the field addresses ideas such as the values and dangers of democracy, the strengths and weaknesses of the rule of law, the content of good political leadership and so forth. This dissertation stands in this tradition, reflecting on the nature of democracy and how a specific problem of democracy itself, namely democratic man, can be solved.

In the first part of this book, I analyse the nature of democratic man and its connection to democracy as a political machine. I raise the question of how this type of man can be seen as a problem and how that challenge is exacerbated in our current age. In the second part, I present an alternative to democratic man: aristocratic man. Where the democratic soul is animated by a love of freedom, the aristocratic soul is marked by a love of virtue. In the Greco-Roman manner of thinking, the man of virtue is the human ideal, excelling in prudence, justice, moderation and fortitude. Its Christian counterpart would add the virtues of charity and humility. This book argues that a transition from democratic man to aristocratic man is possible and desirable in order to have a good society.

The third part reflects on how such a transition can be possible. The short answer is excellent education, which I make more specific by analysing the Greek tradition of *paideia* and Roman tradition of the *artes liberales* which have survived to this day. In the fourth part, I argue that, if such an education were to exist, it only reaches its goals with excellent teachers. Part IV is devoted to an elaborate analysis based on ancient sources on the nature of the excellent teacher.

The notion of democratic man comes from the *Republic*, in which Plato explains that the democratic values of freedom and equality stand in relation with democratic souls who are characterized by a lack of steadfastness and purpose:

[Democratic man] lives along day by day, gratifying the desire that occurs to him, at one time drinking and listening to the flute, at another downing water and reducing; now practicing gymnastic, and again idling and neglecting everything; and sometimes spending his time as though he were occupied with philosophy. Often he engages in politics and, jumping up, says and does whatever chances to come to him; and if he ever admires any soldiers, he turns in that direction; and if it's money-makers, in that one. And there is neither order nor necessity in his life, but calling this life sweet, free, and blessed he follows it throughout. (*Republic* 561c/d, tr. Allan Bloom)

I take this human being, who lives “without order and necessity” and is guided by what presents itself spontaneously, as an image of a young man – also of a contemporary young man. Through parallel studies of Plato’s account, Tocqueville’s depiction of democratic man, Ortega y Gasset’s idea of mass man, and Sennett’s idea of the flexible man, I argue that democracy stands at permanent risk of producing human lives marked by a restive aimlessness.

If the kind of democratic man feared by these philosophers aptly characterizes contemporary democratic culture, we face the question of whether such a person, unable to govern himself, is fit to govern others. Democracy by nature faces this question every day.

My further thesis is that technological developments have aggravated certain unhealthy characteristics of democratic man today. Indeed we have seen the emergence of a new human type: digital man. I elaborate on the analyses made by Postman, Sartori and contemporary scientists who have studied the effects of smartphone use on our mind and way of being. I show that digital man, like democratic man, is characterised also by a high degree of volatility, superficiality and a lack of understanding of matters of eminent importance. The Internet, cell phones and other technological tools have reshaped the human soul.

Is there an alternative? This question is the focus of Part II. I argue that we are not condemned to the state of the democratic man. I call this alternative 'aristocratic man'. He is the antithesis of democratic man. This man makes choices based on a hierarchy of values. He also possesses an inner freedom that makes him unlikely to fall victim to democratic freedom, in the sense of 'doing-what-you-want'. The aristocratic man holds the reins of his life and possesses the qualities needed to lead others. To map out the virtues of aristocratic man, I turn once again to classical authors. Aristotle in his *Nicomachean Ethics* and Cicero in his *On Duties* formulated an ideal of the virtuous man that proved influential for millennia. Even in our democratic age, these philosophers have much to teach those of us who wish to become aristocratic men.

This return to Greco-Roman sources was important for many Renaissance authors who read Aristotle and Cicero and took them as examples for the same reason. Using *Il libro del cortegiano* by Castiglione and the letters of Lord Chesterfield, I show how these Renaissance thinkers made their own contributions to this tradition, offering contemporary readers an even richer picture of aristocratic man.

I also trace the Christian critique and development of the classical account of aristocratic man. Christianity builds on classical foundations, while offering several important corrections to the Greco-Roman model. To bring this into sharper focus, I discuss *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas a Kempis and various other writings, primarily *The Education of the Christian Prince* and the *Handbook for the Christian Soldier* by Erasmus. These authors emphasise humility and charity, virtues which are virtually absent in the classical sources.

In Part III, I argue that a synthesis of the classical and Christian traditions of aristocratic man serves as a basis for better understanding the *artes liberales*, an educational tradition that aims at the formation of aristocratic man. The Greeks called this formation *paideia*. They believed that a certain body of knowledge - disciplines or books - contributes to the cultivation of a life that is truly free and good. The search for this free and good life is related to the acquisition of knowledge. Here, I follow Plato's insistence that knowledge of arithmetic, geometry, cosmology and music plays a crucial role in coming to see and understand that which is true. At the same time, I show that Isocrates' emphasis on the importance of grammar, literary and rhetorical education is at least as important for becoming an educated man.

Plato and Isocrates can be seen as founding fathers of the *artes liberales*. By way of Roman and Christian thinkers, this educational ideal had an immense influence on educational institutions throughout Europe deep into the second millennium. The university itself is built on these foundations. Only in recent years has the term "liberal arts" been disconnected from its classical founders. In their place, a modern vision of liberal arts has come to stress the importance of freedom of choice, progress of knowledge and specialisation. This modern

educational turn is at odds with its classical heritage, which was characterised by a fixed curriculum, the importance of tradition and the ideal of well-roundedness.

Classical, Christian or modern, however, the quality of any liberal arts education does not only depend on the curriculum or list of books. For a student, the road to aristocratic life can only be taken successfully in companionship with a good teacher. This is the thesis I defend in Part IV. It is more than just an addendum. Liberal arts without a good teacher is like a toothless tiger. Using some of Plato's dialogues, I show that he understood this aspect of good education in an extraordinary way. Part IV's analysis of Plato's *Republic* and *Symposium* enables us to grasp the deepest essence of being a teacher. A good teacher is characterised by a double love: a true love for learning and knowledge and a sincere love for students. Both are *conditiones sine qua non*. While technical skill is important, these deeper philosophical conditions prove to be most fundamental in facilitating true liberal education.

This book shows how Isocrates, Quintilian, and Erasmus serve as models for understanding what it means to be a good teacher. In particular, Quintilian's chapter on the teacher in his *Institutio oratoria* as well as Erasmus' *De ratione studii* give concrete recommendations for anyone who wishes to be or become a good teacher. Finally, by discussing Gilbert Highet's book *The Art of Teaching*, I want to show that this classical approach to teaching lives on in our own time.

In this book, I hope to have shown that such education and teaching are not only of value to students, but are indispensable for society as a whole. Indeed, the education I describe produces aristocratic souls, without which a healthy society can hardly exist.

Such a conclusion brings us back to the core of legal philosophy. One of legal philosophy's tasks is to contemplate the nature of the good of society. If the good of society depends on the education described in this book, then legal philosophy must embrace this type of education and this vision of the teacher.