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**Hoe te leven: klassiek of modern? Aristoteles en Hobbes
vergeleken: een filosofische vergelijking tussen het
klassieke en het moderne mens-, wereld- en
samenlevingsbeeld**

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How should one live, classically or modern? Aristotle and Hobbes compared.

A philosophical comparison between the classical and modern view of man, the world and society.

The fundamental research question in this dissertation is what the image of man - in the broadest sense of the word - entails within the classical and modern enlightenment points of view. This overarching question is considered with regard to the notions of man maintained by the ancients and moderns, with regard to their visions of society, and with regard to the worldview these theories entail. We also evaluate which of the two paradigms is the more convincing upon scrutiny. We have answered such questions by distilling the ideas of the classical philosopher Aristotle -and some ontological ideas from his teacher, Plato- on the one hand, and from the modern intellectual giant, Thomas Hobbes, on the other hand. This is premised on the belief that the essential features of the classical and modern idealtypes are to be found within their thought and works.

In order to answer our central question, we had to look into the values which underly each vision of man. After all, values are the ideas that motivate our actions as individuals and as a community. We found that the classical vision is guided by the value of Virtue/Duty, Hierarchy and the pursuit of Community in a world permeated with objective values, whilst the modern conception embraces Freedom, Equality and Individuality in a world that is set free of objective values.

In the first part, we investigate the idea of what man is by considering these thinkers' ideas about the human psyche. What do they have to say about the structure of and motivations within the human, and which view is more convincing? We found that the same words they use tend to refer to very different meanings because of their differing paradigms. Words such as 'man', 'rationality', 'desire', 'virtue', 'pleasure', 'community', 'society', 'nature' and 'reality' differ greatly in meaning.

We observed that the value of Equality is the key to unlocking the modern view. We saw that Hobbes' famous idea of the natural condition, in which there is a war of all against all, throws a light on the relations between the faculties in the soul of the Individual, and more specifically on the relationship between the intellect and the passions. It makes clear that all passions, desires and character dispositions are on an equal footing because nature itself doesn't entail any kind of qualitative measure. The reason for this is that Nature and Being only contain matter in motion. What is natural is just the consequence of what is the most powerful motion

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in matter, and in the case of man by the passions (motion) that are the strongest within the body (matter).

However, this modern egalitarian lack of qualitative measures and values does not alter the fact that it is impossible for all qualitatively equal strivings to reign in the soul. Some passions are more vehement. Thus, the quantitatively strongest and most powerful passions rule our actions. According to Hobbes, the strongest passions in man are the fear of death and the desire for self-preservation. In addition, there is a powerful desire to live a life of pleasure. These fundamental and most vehement passions rule the mind and the intellect, which means that the intellect is to be viewed as a handmaiden of the passions. This applies to both the practical (action orientated) and theoretical (contemplational) capacities of the human intellect.

In the classical view, however, man, through his distinctive rationality, feels an attraction (*eros*) towards his spiritual and intelligible Ideal. Through his intellect and intuition, he is able to see the hierarchically ordered Ideal of Man as a rational and social being. According to this Ideal, in which the interior of man is hierarchically structured, the intellect, as the qualitatively worthier part, is to rule over the desires and passions. Both uses of the intellect, the contemplative as well as the practical, have to be realized in order to fully unfold this highest potential and Ideal. The unfolding and realization of this hierarchical Ideal also constitutes meaning and happiness.

There is also some agreement between these opposed views. Aristotle agrees with Hobbes on the contention that the soul is initially in the grip of the more basic and selfish pursuits, namely, the ego's drives towards a will to power, recognition, honor, wealth and revenge, and in the grip of the sensual desire for pleasure of food, drink and sex. But the classical thinker's idea is that these basic drives and passions are destructive in their rough, uncivilized and intemperate form, like a river overflowing its banks. The classical view argues that all desires and strivings need to be tempered for our own wellbeing.

This is where the Ideal of practical reason, traditionally also known as the virtue of Prudence, comes in. Through Prudence, insight is gained into the general Ideal of Man and the concrete circumstances of action. These insights into the general Ideal and those concrete circumstances enable the agent to choose the right and virtuous action. And through the repetition of such virtuous acts the agent is able to reshape his character dispositions, and the corresponding strivings and emotions, into virtuous forms. These excellent character traits are

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the (classical) virtues such as Courage, Temperance, Justice, Kindness, Generosity, Truthfulness, Trustworthiness, Courtesy, Great-Souledness and the like. These are qualitatively excellent character traits that are somehow valuable in themselves and not merely instrumental, but are also necessary for living well together within communities.

In the modern view, however, reason or the intellect has an instrumental character. The intellect doesn't lead the passions. It simply functions to serve the most dominant passions. The modern constellation also has its correlative concept of truth with regard to human affairs. Truth is what functions with regard to the satisfaction of the strongest passions, especially with a view to securing the fundamental modern value placed on Life, property and the possibility of enjoyment. In other words, truth functions with a view to a general (social) peace and security. Truth is thus whatever fosters peace and security.

As mentioned, our investigation of theories on the inner workings of man showed how the value of qualitative Hierarchy structures the classical concept of man, and how the opposite value of Equality does the same for the modern view. However, we were still unable in this first part of our investigation to answer the question of which of these paradigms was the more convincing.

The aporic results from the first part naturally carried our investigation into the second, concerning the thinkers' differing ontological views. We had to investigate what reality consists of and what being means, because in order to determine what man is we first had to have a notion of what *is* means, or what *real* means, in order to judge whether Ideas -such as the classical Idea(l) of Man- are real or whether all general Idea(l)s are mere figments of our imagination provided that only matter in motion is real.

The difference between the two views in this regard is that in the classical representation man finds himself embedded in a meaningful cosmos. For Aristotle, the world is saturated with general Forms in the things visible to us. They give such things their general purpose, meaning and Ideal. Hence, the unfolding of the Ideal of Man is what provides man with meaning. The realization of this Ideal of being rational and sociable is not valuable for instrumental reasons. Being rational and sociable isn't a means but an end in itself, and we experience this as such in our growth towards this Ideal.

In contrast, when studying Hobbes, we are struck by the modern view of nature and reality, in which everything that *is* consists of matter in motion. In this view, no intelligible

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realm of Forms, Ideas or Ideals is real. It is by this materialistic worldview that the moderns have been able to free themselves from a belief in objective Ideals out there. By disenchanting the world, modern man has become emancipated and scientifically 'realistic'. The connection between the normative (the Good and Beautiful) and the natural has been severed. Hence, for Hobbes, and for us moderns who have followed in his wake, the vault of heaven contains no values, no ideals, no duties. We enjoy cosmic Freedom. A deafening silence embraces us, and this cosmic Freedom brings with it the necessity to create our own rules and values.

Upon philosophical scrutiny, we concluded that the classical ontology in which general Ideas and Ideals are real was more convincing than the view in which reality only consists of matter in motion. The Form/Ideas ontology entails, as was said, that things have a general Measure and Ideal for each kind of thing. In the case of man, his Ideal is partly determined by his DNA, but even more importantly by the intelligible Ideal of the rational and social being that he has to live up to through his voluntary and ethical actions. This Ideal is not to be found in empirical man as such. It is an intelligible Ideal and a capacity he needs to fulfill.

However, at the end of the second part of our investigation we still weren't fully able to answer the question of which idea of man was the more convincing, because we were confronted with the classical assumption that man not only is a rational but also a social animal and man's social aspect was not yet accounted for in our investigation. This led us to part III. In this context, we examined what the different ontological views at hand imply for the different conceptions of living together and the principles that structure living together (ethics/morality/law/natural law/natural right).

We came to see that the modern vision is about the emancipation of the atomic Individual. Within the modern paradigm, man by nature is an isolated and free being with natural rights. The aforementioned emancipation from values makes this atomic Individual not only free from morality but also equal to every other existing Individual. As we said, there is no natural and objective standard of good and evil (no heteronomy of the Good and Beautiful) individuals are to be measured against. Freedom thus heralds natural Equality. Given that all are equal, no one has anybody above or beyond him. Any form of obligation can therefore only arise out of the Will of free and equal Individuals themselves (autonomy). That is why the social contract is such a crucial concept within the modern imagination of society and morality. It is the only means by which to bridge the gap between the scientific *Is* and the socially required *Ought*.

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Modern men have to invent their rules. As Equals they have to make equal concessions when formulating the rules for living together. Hence, those rules have an egalitarian character. Hobbes calls these the 19 natural laws or virtues, such as peace-lovingness, acceptance of equal freedom, commutative justice, gratitude, agreeableness, forgiveness, future-orientedness, non-disparagement, egalitarian-kindness, modesty, fairness, the prohibition of self-righteousness and the like. All individuals are willing to commit to these through an imagined social contract because of their self-interest for peace. This shows that all such modern principles and values are only instrumentally and hypothetically valuable given that the Individual is only prepared to impose such freedom-restricting measures upon himself out of his self-interest. Hence, the modern individual is only prepared to commit to such a social contract under the condition that others do the same, and if, and only if, the sovereign is powerful enough to enforce those rules. We see that in the modern view morality boils down to something like the harm principle and social-peace-engineering.

What are their views of community? Provided that reality and nature merely consist of matter in motion and that nature doesn't harbor any generalities or ideals, there is nothing natural about the existing communities and associations. This means that there are no general ideals upon which such communities are to be modeled. All communities are form-free entities to be created and shaped by the ruling passions, powers and forces.

Seen from the classical point of view this "emancipation" of the atomic Individual amounts to disenchantment, and a disembedding of the individual from his natural setting in communities. In turn, it disembeds those communities out of the meaningful and sacred cosmic tapestry. Within this sacred cosmic tapestry, ethical virtues contain an inherently valuable social dimension. The reason for this is that they are ingrained in the Form and Ideal of Man. In this view, man is by nature a socially bound being, tied to various smaller and larger communities such as the community of marriage, the nucleus family, household, the broader family, neighborhood, friendships, associations, village, social/ religious/ artistic/ scientific institute and (city) state. Man is thus a being that is bound by communities and bound by his duties towards these communities. He is only able to flourish within these communities, which he needs in order to further develop his ideal character traits. Each of his communities lays claim to his devotion, but also offers the opportunity to further develop the inherently valuable virtues. It is only through such concrete communities that the abstract natural obligations (natural laws) are given concrete and determined form (laws and ethics), which are imposed with regard to

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the principle of social subsidiarity. The fundamental notion is thus that the individual is only able to be lifted to his Ideal through the communities he is obligated to serve. Hence man is everything but an atomistic Individual. He is a social being. We found this view to be convincing as well. In the end, in all three of the areas of our investigation, the psychological, ontological and socio-political, the classical view seemed to be the more convincing one. The final conclusion of the dissertation is that the classical conception of man, of his communities and of the world, in which man is bound to an Ideal, is internally Hierarchically structured according to this Ideal, and is Community-bound instead of Free, Equal and Atomistic, is the more convincing paradigm.

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.

T.S. Eliot