

Book Review

Senelle, R., Clement, E., Van de Velde, E. (2012). The Road to Political Democracy. Brussels: ASP.

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The quest for democracy is, and, in a much broader sense, has been a challenging outlook for those, committedly or not, concerned. We live in so- called prescribed postmodern era, with an emergence of new state mechanisms and supra-national structure which make us feel there would be a more optimized way for the state, society and the people to be democratized than in the old days.

It is not true.

This book serves as a good example of viewing this matter from many aspects: historical, philosophical, sociological, cultural, economical, legal and administrative. It begins in the first part with three guiding questions – (1) on the origin of the state and the need to rule and to be ruled; (2) on the different political system – the importance of the roots in antiquity; (3) on what ground is the ruler's authority founded? These questions are set in order to prepare the reader to get on the good ground, then followed by what being used here as the “pavement”: the analysis of political democracy

by four Aristotelian characteristics which are (1) the rule by turn and the extent to which all citizens have a stake of interest; (2) the importance of the middle class; (3) the rule of law; (4) the rule of education. The closing section of the first part of this book is named as the Journey on the Road to Political Democracy, presented with some thoughtful dialectic views, even warning ones, to those wishing themselves to untimely encounter the perfect world.

The second part of this book is “the Workers on and the Building Blocks of the Road to Political Democracy”. Here presented are (frame)works from Plato, Aristotle, Marcus Tullius Cicero, the Magna Carta, Habeas Corpus Act, Bill of Rights, John Locke, Voltaire, Charles-Louis de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu, David Hume, Jean-Jacque Rousseau, Thomas Paine, the Virginia Declaration of Rights, the United States Declaration of Independence, Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, John Jay, the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen (French National Constituent Assembly), the 1791 Bill of Rights of the United States of America, Benjamin Constant, Alexis de Tocqueville, John Stuart Mill, Maximilian Weber, J. A. Schumpeter, F. A. Hayek, Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN), Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (the Council of Europe), Hannah Arendt, Isaiah Berlin, Raymond Aron, John Rawls, Maurice Duverger, Robert Nozick, F. Fukuyama, S. Huntington, A. Sen and Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU. Closing section is in form of “post-script” presented by Herman Van Rompuy, the President of the European Council on Europe, Political Democracy and the Flux of Time.

In terms of unit of analysis, the authors, while giving comments at the every end of each ‘mini chapter’, have differentiated this unit in different layers ranging from a deep individual to a broad state according to each philosopher’s, thinker’s or practitioner’s state of nature. We can see units of analysis when comments are given to Plato very much different from those to Sen, Paine and Rawls. Despite this variation, one grasps the underlying fact that the “one size fits all” approach never exists. Rather, regardless how many years have passed, political democracy, here metaphorically being described as the end of the road, never has its own blocks. And despite this variation, this book shows us it is of utmost important to have a right conceptual framework of human beings, not only because it is a fundamental fact for every social science subject but because it gives one a true “direction” when driving towards a democracy. Human beings can be just a labor animal, economic man, administrative man, political man, or they can even be a person. Thus, freedom, for instance, among human beings as a labor animal might not be the same as that among persons. To some extent, the Maximin rule cannot be applied to any societal context being far from calculable quality. The closing remarkson future democracy pinpoints some concerns about how to retain the quality of civilisation which, again, never belongs to human beings who are not a person.

It is not so often that the terminology of Sovereignty in a so-called Political Science literature is neatly analyzed and interpreted. What you can find in this book are analyses and

interpretations of legislative, executive and judiciary power to some findings in democratic value and practice. All-encompassing? Yes. But, regarding the fact that there is somehow another “extra” form of political institutions which is in status neither legislative nor executive nor judiciary, for example, one in Thailand which was called a “constitutional autonomous body” performing functions of counter corruption, managing elections, general audit and ombudsman - another roadblock (!) - it would then be more suitable to have more of this for our contemporary situation.

This documented 25 century experience is invaluable for Thais at all levels. Thailand has been moving towards a tunnel of paradoxes and dilemmas in search of democracy. Sensitive as it will always be, society should learn primarily to be “democratic” in thoughts – not from a learning-by-doing ground. Having been striving for almost 80 years is a quest for the one best way, only just to realize it will never yield anything. Democratizing is not standardizing - that is a next step what the Thais must learn from this book.