



UNIVERSIDADE
CATÓLICA
PORTUGUESA

INSTITUTO DE
ESTUDOS
POLÍTICOS

Master Thesis

Democracy, Education, and the Classics

A proposal

By

Tomé Ribeiro Gomes

Supervisor

Hugo Miguel Mimoso Chelo

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

MA in Governance, Leadership and Democracy Studies

Universidade Católica Portuguesa – Instituto de Estudos Políticos

June 2016

Abstract

Democracy is a never-ending challenge. Plato's warning about the decadence of the soul under democracy will forever haunt us, and we only lose by adopting the triumphalist attitude which renounces the need for self-criticism and continual improvement. In our time, the challenge comes in the form of global interconnectedness, light-speed travelling information, and superabundant distractions faced by nearly everyone, nearly all of the time. But democracy thrives on a different sort of environment: it requires calm, attentive reading, listening, and reflection. Educational institutions are generally struggling to adapt to this 'brave new world.' They insist on employing the traditional method of education which does not improve understanding and fails to motivate students for autonomous learning and active citizenship. However, the problem of education is seldom seriously addressed in the public sphere and is relatively underdeveloped even in the literature of political science and political philosophy. In this thesis, I draw mainly from political philosophy, philosophy of education, and epistemology, to assert that (1) democracy requires a large number of active citizens for its preservation, that (2) traditional education does not serve that end, but that (3) liberal education does, and (4) one way of achieving it is through the group reading and discussion of ancient Greek texts. This thesis is then an attempt to show that liberal education – or teaching for autonomy and citizenship – is a necessity in a democracy that aims to be not merely an institutional arrangement, but a way of life.

Word count (excluding bibliography): 24.921