

## SYNOPSIS

**Jurriën Rood**

***What's wrong with authority?***

**A new look at a familiar subject**

(Lemniscaat, 2013, 330 p.)

'This is not a call to revert to a world of repression and old fashioned, violent authority. What I propose on the contrary is to advance, to a voluntarily supported and modernly executed form of authority' – Jurriën Rood

*What's wrong with authority?* offers a combination of theory and praxis, of reportage and philosophy, in a clear and appealing style, intended for a large audience interested in problems of authority. In 2014, the book was nominated for the Socratescup, the Dutch prize for the best, most thought-provoking philosophical publication. According to the jury:

'Without prejudice Jurriën Rood describes the reality of the police-practices in the streets. After which he turns to philosophy to answer the maybe most urgent question of our times: how can officials regain their authority in the public domain? Exemplary.'

Other reactions and commentaries:

'Elucidating and thorough.' – Olaf Tempelman in *the Volkskrant*

'Splendid and interesting' – Evelien Tonkens, professor of Citizenship and Humanization of the Public Sector

'High time that mr. Rood's publications find a larger audience' – Gabriël van den Brink, professor of Public Administration

'Rood answers our urgent questions about authority, sparing nobody and leaving no stone unturned. You will not find a better book on authority in decades' – René Kneyber, teacher

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*What's wrong with authority?* Is a practical-philosophical study of the functioning of police, government and citizens in a society where authority is scarce. Ever since the sixties authority has become a tainted notion in the Netherlands. With as most unhappy consequence the increase of aggression and violence in the public zone. This book presents a new outlook on our disturbed relation with authority and officials. Written by a philosopher/filmmaker after an extensive investigation of years into the *street-authority* of the Amsterdam police. And introducing a new and modern form of authority, pointing a way out of the current authority deadlock.

A book as a voyage of discovery. Starting out practically and down to earth, with the police on the streets of Amsterdam, then gradually diving deeper in the backgrounds of a concept that is so easily used in the social debate. What does authority mean, how did it get so contaminated and could it in some way still be useful for societal purposes? In times when traditional authorities are confronted with aggression and violence during their work, when the call for 'good oldfashioned authority' is heard while the officials seem to be paralyzed, the authority debate gets stuck between undesirable opposites: violent authoritarianism on the one hand and nonauthoritarian permissiveness on the other. This book offers a new, clearly presented third option based on praxis, as a way out of the dilemma,.

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A philosopher/filmmaker, one-time activist from the generation of protest, gets the chance to work as a free investigator at the Amsterdam police force. At a time when, according to the headlines, the police is losing all its authority, especially with young people. Much to his surprise he finds that the police in the streets actually wields a large and natural authority. In a new form, that has hardly been put into words. The police has developed a *communicative authority*, based on a combination of talking and enforcing.

The discovery of this 'third' pattern of authority, following the traditional violent-authoritarian form and the consequent restrained non-authority of the eighties and nineties, is the cause for writing this book. What elements constitute communicative authority and how could society as a whole profit from it? A journey starts into the heart of authority, made up of three parts.

The first part is an extensive report of the practical investigations at the police including an analysis of communicative authority. But if the police actually does possess an effective authority, what then is the problem, or was it all a media hype? The second part enlarges the scope of investigation to the status of authority in Dutch society as a whole. Painting a recent national history of authority the issue becomes clear: the grown impopularity of *the idea* of authority plus the impotence of a society without authority to deal with violence. It's not the police that lacks authority, but many other levels of the public administration do. Resulting in a disturbing increase of violent attacks on these (former) authorities and a rise of the power of force in the public domain. A rehabilitation of a certain authority seems necessary. In the third part this new form is elaborated, on the basis of the police praxis as well as ideas from the classical political philosophy of Locke and Rousseau. *V-authority* it's called, a voluntarily accepted and critically sponsored authority. A new form that can solve the current authority deadlock.

Such a resolution can not limit itself to the *wielding* of authority. Much attention is payed to what can be described as the forgotten side of the authority problem: the *acknowledging/granting* of authority. Starting from Webers classical definition of authority, which presents authority as a relation of parties, emphasis is laid on the granting of authority through the people, that is to say: we all. Authority is not feasible without foundation. This book shows the ideas on which a new foundation may be built. And which roles are to be played by the different parties involved: the police, the government and the population, and certainly the media too. Painful aspects of the problem are not avoided, such as the unwillingness of many modern citizens to support authority, let alone to see it as their own responsibility.

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Jurriën Rood (1955) is a philosopher and a filmmaker and both professions are reflected in this book. He was writer and director of fiction film, television and documentaries and worked as a filmcritic, stage-director and comedian. In 1983 he won the Leids Cabaretfest with his own cabaretgroupp. In 2006 he graduated with distinction in philosophy; his doctoral thesis *Stanislavski Meets Embodied Cognition* compares a new philosophical theory with a well known actors praxis.

'I never wanted to be a cop. In my generation of protest the police was regarded as an accomplice of an order that we did not hold in high esteem. Thirtyfive years later not only the world has changed, but me too; I have become interested in the order and its maintenance. For one and a half years I will accompany the police, or rather the Police Force Amsterdam-Amstelland, in my role as philosopher/filmmaker. Long enough to learn the police perspective, but not indefinitely. So my own perspective will remain intact alongside it. And that of course, is exactly how the Juxta project is intended.' – Jurriën Rood

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