

Cultivating Liberalism

For the last ten years, I have been a professor of moral and political philosophy in one of Madrid's most prominent universities; and each academic year I have found myself distressed at the lack of understanding and sympathy that most of my students show towards Liberalism. Their want of knowledge regarding Liberalism does not only concern its meaning or its rich and contested historical tradition; it relates mostly to *its basic institutions in Spain itself*, institutions under which the students—and all of us Spaniards—live and prosper since 1978.

Each academic year, the mere utterance of the words “market” or “globalized economy”—let alone “liberal market” or “a more liberal global economy”—provokes, in the classroom, the same reactions: a smirking silence at best, an angry resistance at worst. The thing is that, after a brief exchange with the students, they confess not to know what “market” means, nor what it is good for, (and the same goes for “rights”, “congress”, or even “the executive”. They are 3rd year students of Humanities).

I want, in my brief intervention, to expound what I think are some of the causes of this slight of Liberalism among Spanish students, (and somehow help continue the sort of work Martha Nussbaum so admirably endeavours in *Cultivating Humanity*):

In the first place, in the Spanish University as a whole, the “intellectual” and “moral” hegemony of the most vulgar Left remains undisputed. By “vulgar” I refer to the Left of unexamined and (thus) never changing commonplaces; the one that “dispatches” Liberalism in the classroom (or the press) with its well-known “tirades”—an exploitative, capitalistic, semi-fascist, inhuman system.

In my opinion, this “intellectual” and “moral” hegemony of the vulgar Left in the University, (that is to say, *uncritical*, and *intolerant* of any other political views but its own), echoes but at the same time perpetuates an identical hegemony *in Spanish public reason and politics at large*, (the Spanish University being, with few and respectable exceptions, the privileged milieu of anti-liberal tenets).

For, in the second place, the Spanish *civil and political* Left is boringly and tritely anti-globalization and, under the boring and trite banner of its (own) “progressive justice” undermines, most often, civic freedom, equality, and peace.

Thus, the creation of agricultural (and many other) “clienteles” during the first three socialist Legislatures, and their entrenchment nowadays in the poorest and less competitive regions of Spain; the opposition to the liberalization of international markets *in order to protect such clientelistic interests*, (which, incidentally, I also think is true of the French and German Left—their solidarity being groupist, not human, solidarity); the recent attempts by Zapatero's Government, with the help of the “peripheral” Left, to dismantle not only the unity of the country, but the equality of all Spaniards before the law and in the enjoyment of their rights—(equality that these days, and scared by the “excessive” demands of the Catalan (and Basque) new ethnicist oligarchies— demands which the Government itself encouraged to start with, some members of the Left pretend to defend as “*solidarity among regions*” (¿ethnoses?!); the disrespect that the same government and oligarchies have shown towards the different associations of “victims of terrorism” (excepting the ones sponsored by themselves), and towards the constituencies of the Popular Party (both, constituencies, in plural, and Party isolated and ignored as seamlessly “rightist”); the unearthing of the bodies of the Civil War's leftists, when we have so much and so much urgent to confront as a country, let alone so many *other* bodies to disinter, etc., are sad examples of what I want to denounce here.

I know that to say these or similar things in the Spanish University (or the press, or the media), means the automatic accusation by your colleagues of “fascist”, “new converse” or *similar* (¿“liberal”?). Yet, next year we will commemorate the Bicentennial of J. Stuart Mill's birth. And I want to pay my respects, *precisely with this sort of talk*, to a thinker greatly influential in (pluralistic and tolerant) education and public morals.

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