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The State of Humanities in Spain

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Abstract: Humanities have been in crisis for a long time, because they continuously need to grow and to be updated, which is not necessarily always negative. This crisis in the humanities has a strong relationship with cultural changes. During the 20th century the concept of culture has been revised for several times, especially during the sixties, but it has not been until the book of Lyotard Postmodernity when "globalization" has started to play an important role in this area. The key points of the current crisis of the humanities are consequence of a strong criticism (which comes from the period of Descartes and Kant, who settled the basis of this crisis), of the lack of authority, and of the common culture. The solution has to be searched in the creation of new reactions towards the power of these pressure groups. In this paper, we will analyze the repercussions of all these factors in the Spanish humanities, and we will study the solutions which are being offered to organize that reaction, such as the creation of literary prizes, the foundation of philosophical communities, the defence of human rights and law studies, the development of cultural inheritance, the increase of social conscience (non-profit organizations), the proliferation of activities related with the Arts, and religious development. All these strategies have three common aims: to flee of authoritarian or imposed solutions, to look for concrete and positive expressions, and to boost concrete and local cultural projects. As far as the situation in Spain is concerned, although the perspectives are not very dark, they can suffer changes due to political conflicts and interests, which can damage severely the future of our national thought.

Keywords: Humanities, Humanism, Crisis, Spain, Culture, Postmodernity

THE CONCEPT OF "culture" and the disciplines related to it have always been in some way associated with "crisis". However, it is necessary to admit that during the last 25 years a revision of the most important concepts related to these areas has been made. Terms like "humanities" and "culture" have to be redefined and delimited (Sassoon 2006).

Until the middle of the 20th century, the word "humanities" was understood as the knowledge of classic languages and cultures (such as Latin and Greek), and in the broad sense, everything related to the literary culture. When people tried to be more precise, they talked about "humanists", people who had helped in some way in the development of the literary and arts world, making important contributions to philanthropy. Humanism was not necessarily related to religion, but the Catholic religion was understood as a supreme humanism, because atheistic humanism was not really acceptable (Lubac 1946).

The Second World War established democracy as a political model, and motivated vast development in the sciences and technologies, which were a consequence of the economic wellness that Europe was

enjoying after the new systematization of its wealth. One consequence of this situation was an important change in demography. This change, added to the revolution in communication systems, made critics talk about the beginnings of a new period, which was first defined as the "atomic era"¹, and after a period of time the "postmodern era"².

Two important factors in this situation were the 2nd Vatican Council, and May 1968. The crisis became mature when the voice of critics was exposed in philosophy, which created the argumentation to analyze them. This phenomenon didn't take place until the end of the sixties³.

The traces of these two factors have contributed to the creation of authenticating metadiscourses. It is at this point where the crisis of humanities takes place⁴. Important work has been attempted to gain control over what is legitimate and what is not legitimate in the so-called "humanities". The situation before this change had been simple: a person could be considered a "humanist" if he agreed with traditional argument in his thoughts, according to the system. However, with the new criticism this situ-

¹ Those changes took place associated to the publications: *Índice, Cuadernos para el Diálogo*, to the movements of "Acción Católica" (Catholic Movement), and especially "Acción Católica Obrera". Also from another point of view in the humoristic journal: *La Codorniz*.

² The term "postmodernity" was created after the word "modernity", to highlight the new changes. "Modernity" characterized the sensibility at the end of the sixties, whereas "postmodernity" wanted to express the superiority that people felt towards past time.

³ The first point of reference was probably the book of Jean-François Lyotard (1984).

⁴ The way has been long: it starts at the end of the 19th century, but it reaches maturity with the names of Gadamer, Foucault, Harvey Cox, Bell, Fukuyama, Huntington, Habermas, Vattimo and many more. In Spain the names of Aranguren, F. Savater, Sádaba, J. A. Marina, can not be forgotten in this evolution.



ation changed and humanism had to be expressed with other arguments than the traditional ones.

Attempts to Describe the Present Situation

Describing the current situation is quite a difficult task, as the present moment has to be understood as a whole composed of several factors.

One of the most important factors has been the rejection of the “authority” of traditional systems of thought. Governments want to give to all individuals the same opportunities in the area of thought and education (even forgetting that the purpose of education is to integrate the child into culture). This situation has been supported by the leaders of a “liberating” movement⁵, whose motto is the sentence pronounced by Father Lombardi “It’s necessary to rebuild a complete world from the very foundations”. The sentence was interpreted literally and the results were much more radical than people had ever imagined. “Historical rights” were discussed despite all the ideological and social tradition. From that point, contemporary thought has been characterized by a drastic criticism, associated with the rejection of the authorities as a possible solution for the problems.

This critical trend has also been reflected in other areas, like philology. The classicists have abandoned their previous consideration towards “humanities”. They have realized that the classical world is much more important for other areas than philology itself, and have shared their knowledges with other disciplines more important for the current research fields, like Linguistics or Literature. A result of this situation has been the lack in our present times of researchers like Rohde, Jaeger or Wilamowitz, remembered for their commentaries and interpretation of classical thoughts. Even those professors who were important thinkers in the beginnings of the 20th century, have not produced any work comparable to their first creations⁶, even though the advances in the field have been really important in the last years⁷, as can be seen in the new and helpful journals which have been created⁸, the important books and monographs published, and dissertations of undeniable value.

Another consequence of the new situation is that “action” has taken the main role, to justify personal and social conscience. It is necessary to quote here the names of Dilthey, Bergson, Ortega and Blondel,

as well as the reflections of other evangelical theologians, who have emphasized the importance of life taking roots as a criterion for serious reflections. For this reason, the value of some historical works created by people who didn’t show any sensibility towards the changing world have been discussed and rejected.

However, the popularity gained and maintained during the second half of the 20th century by authors like Dietrich Bonhoefer, Luther King or Gandhi is a fact. In the same period in Spain an important book was written by J. Ballesteros: *La postmodernidad: decadencia o Resistencia* (2000). All of these factors have contributed to create a social conscience, which is shown in the strength of popular demonstrations, promoted by political or social opposition.

These new humanities are demanding. They want to reach everybody, to be learned by all people. As a result, humanities are not only in the studies of researchers or thinkers, they are published for people. Scientific books are sold in kiosks in the street. Specialized journals in sciences, nature, literature or arts are sold for everybody and are easy and cheap to get. Television and radio create programs of cultural interest, and their strength has powerful effects.

In this global effort to make communication possible, the role of the Internet has been primary: the new virtual world in which people have found a shelter. There they can escape from physical pressures, even though it is not so easy. It is necessary to look and to distinguish amongst the huge amount of information. The web may not be a creative tool, but it provides each individual with information and prevents him from being isolated from the world. If the Internet is used with responsibility and knowledge, it can be a great source of wealth. Every year the possibilities are increased and, most importantly, they are easily accesible to everyone.

The “Products” of Contemporary Humanities

The new situation has resulted in important changes in society. I will describe some of the most important changes that have taken place in the last decades.

One of those changes has been the creation of a significant amount of literary awards. In Spain there are more than 1500 awards given annually. The most renowned are the prize “Cervantes”, the prize

⁵ Those leaders belonged to many different areas. Some of them were thinkers (like Chomsky or Luther King, and in Spain P. Llanos, P. Díez Alegría, etc.), and other were politicians (in Spain Alfonso Guerra).

⁶ Examples of this situation were the Professors Fernández Galiano, Laso de la Vega, Adrados, Luis Gil, and Sánchez Ruipérez, famous for works like: *El nacimiento del amor en Grecia*, *Introducción a Homero*, or *La inspiración poética*, many times edited. But now they are working on important studies on Indoeuropean languages, phonology and linguistics. But they have abandoned humanism in some way.

⁷ There have been important discoveries and studies. An important sample of them is the monument of the “Cueva Negra” (Black Cave) in Fortuna (Murcia), the edition of visigotic slates, the great quantity of epigraphic testimonies that have been discovered in the last decades, and much more important advances.

⁸ Like *Emerita*, *Habis*, *Cuadernos de Filología Clásica*, *la Revista de Estudios Latinos*, *Hispania Epigraphica*, or *Antigüedad y Cristianismo*.

“Príncipe de Asturias”, the prize “Nadal” and the prize “Planeta”. These awards are really prestigious due to the popularity gained by people who receive them. The prizes have contributed to a flowering of literature. And this flowering is probably much stronger now than it has ever been. However, it is necessary to take into account that the number of readers has not increased in the same way as the number of books has.

The area of Philosophy has experienced some important transformations. A lot of critical studies of different nature and interests have been conducted by journalists⁹ and professional thinkers¹⁰. As far as religion is concerned, there has been a strong tendency to insist on popular cultures, forgetting the most important points in a very controversial way¹¹. Only a small part of the population is interested in ideological movements like “Justice and Peace” created by Mounier¹², the Christian Cultural Movement¹³ of “Communion and Liberation”, etc.

As far as Laws are concerned, there are significant massive demonstrations in favour of human rights in multiple aspects. They fight for peace and life, against terrorism, poverty and repression. But the problem is that there are people who think that these are problems that have to be solved by the institutional power, which does not care about them.

The Arts are characterized by splendid productions, especially in the area of architecture. In the last years several monuments in Spain have been built, like the bridges of Calatrava, the Museum Guggenheim, wine caves of great design and beauty, and a lot of famous architectural works. In painting, the abstract style that characterized the beginnings of the 20th century has not disappeared, but it has evolved into more realistic styles. Sculptors are still looking for shapes (like Botero or Campillo), but it is especially in the area of religious and popular tra-

ditions where the artists follow popular but innovative designs. The only problem is that a great part of this art is perishable.

But perhaps the most important facts related to the Arts are the exhibitions that have been shown during the last 25 years, promoted by the church and local administrations. The best known names of these kinds of expositions are “Las Edades del Hombre” (The Ages of Humanity), which has already had 12 exhibitions in different cities, and each has published a catalogue with all the objects shown in the exposition, most of them of religious and historical interest for Spanish inheritance¹⁴. The same can be said of “La Luz de las Imágenes” (The Light of Images) in the Comunidad Valenciana, “Orígenes” (Origins) in Asturias, “La Rioja, Tierra Abierta” (The Rioja, Opened Country), and others of the same relevance like “*Imagen de un reino*” (Image of a Kingdom) and “*Tudela. El legado de una catedral*” (Tudela. The Legacy of a Cathedral)¹⁵, in Navarra in 2006.

It is also important to add the events organized with didactic purposes, like the exhibitions on history and archeology organized by the National Archeological Museum of Madrid, “Artifex”; those about historical personages, like the politician “Sagasta”¹⁶, also in Madrid; those prepared by the “Sociedad Estatal para la Acción Cultural Exterior”, about “Philipp II” at El Escorial, “Charles 5th” in Toledo¹⁷, “Erasmus of Rotterdam” in Salamanca¹⁸, and “Isabel of Spain” in the Cathedral of Toledo. Last but not least, those devoted to important religious and artistic persons, like the exhibitions organized about “*Maria Inmaculada*” in the centenary of the definition of the dogma¹⁹, and “*San Isidoro. Doctor Hispaniae*” in Sevilla, León and Murcia.

This phenomenon of exhibitions has been especially important after 1985²⁰, when the group of the “Edades del Hombre” was created. After that, the

⁹ Journalism is very influential in Spain, and has been decisive in political conflicts and important situations (like the terrorist attacks of 11th March 2004).

¹⁰ It is very interesting to highlight that in the Complete Works of the Professor of Metaphysics of the Universidad Complutense Prof. S. Rábade Romero, the first volume is completely devoted to criticism: *El conocer humano I (Human Knowledge)* (2003).

¹¹ Spanish catholicism, especially when controlled and directed by the Episcopal Conference, has not accepted the challenge of the critic, as it can be seen in the way in which Religion classes are focused.

¹² It is necessary to remember here the works of Carlos Díaz.

¹³ This movement publishes the booklets of the collection *La voz de los sin voz (The voice of those without voice)*, published in Madrid and edited by Librería Dersa.

¹⁴ The impact of them has been so important, that there have appeared new exhibitions, even in the same area, like *Legados*, organized in Toro (Zamora) during last year 2006.

¹⁵ This exhibition took place from 22nd September 2006 until 7th January 2007. The catalogue was edited by the Fundación para la conservación del Patrimonio Histórico de Navarra, Pamplona 2006.

¹⁶ *Sagasta y el Liberalismo español*, Fundación BBVA, Fundación Argentaria, 12/20/2000-2/18/2001. The catalogue was published with the collaboration of the “Colegio de Ingenieros de Caminos Canales y Puertos”, Madrid 2000.

¹⁷ *Carolvs*, Museo de Santa Cruz, Toledo, 10/06/2000-01/12/2001. This exhibition was created by the “Sociedad Estatal para la Conmemoración de los Centenarios de Felipe II y Carlos V”.

¹⁸ The catalogue had 379 pages and its title was: *Erasmus en España. La recepción del Humanismo en el Primer Renacimiento Español. Escuelas menores de la Universidad de Salamanca. 26 de septiembre del 2002-6 de enero del 2003*, Madrid 2002.

¹⁹ One example of these exhibitions is: *Inmaculada. 150 años de la Proclamación del Dogma, Sevilla. Catedral Metropolitana. Mayo-noviembre del 2004*, Córdoba, Caja Sur, 2004.

²⁰ However, in that year, the exhibition about *Los Caminos de la Región de Murcia* was not opened, although it had been planned, because of the high expenses of the project proposed.

number of exhibition grows and grows every year. However, the percentage of the population interested in this kind of events is not as high as one might desire, only 5%.

In the area of spectacles or cultural and social manifestations, a high number of festivals have also been created. Their topics are wide-ranging.

There are dancing, singing and music galas, like the famous annual gala of Benidorm, and other new manifestations, like the one in Zamora, celebrated in July 2006.

The movie industry has also been positively affected by all of these events. Especially important is the "Festival de Cine de San Sebastián", the oldest one in this kind of performances; but also those of Mallorca, Cartagena, Jerez and Gijón.

Theatre doesn't want to be isolated in this area. It also has live presentations in old famous theatres, like the theatre of Almagro (already famous in the 16th century), and the even older Classical Theatre of Mérida and Segóbriga.

Political feasts are a good excuse to celebrate galas that gather for one night an important number of famous singers, dancers, or even magicians.

Another important "product" of this new vision of the humanities is the creation of new Non-Profit Organizations, designed to help people to improve our surrounding world. Political institutions have understood very well the important role of these kinds of organizations, as they try to help them as much as possible. The problem is the same that has already been mentioned; few people are interested in taking part or helping this kind of groups.

Another important result of the changes is increased the interest for local history. Small villages are trying to preserve their cultural legacy, creating hundreds of local museums in which they showcase manifestations of their culture, local products and popular instruments.

But the consequences apply to all areas. Religion has lost the spirit of collectivity for which it was characterized a century ago, in favor of more popular manifestations like pilgrimages or popular fests, like the "Procesiones" (a kind of religious demonstrations), associated with the Christian Holy Week.

Also the social situation is more and more complicated, due to the effects of an intense immigration that affects Spanish society. Humanism has to be alternated with integration, and this is not always an easy role.

Attempts of Global Characterization

As it can be appreciated, changes have affected all of the areas. Humanism seems have been popularized and democratized. Being "humanist" is no longer more presented as a distinctive trace. The problem

is that there is not a common agreement about what is humanism, and about which orientation is necessary to give to the humanities. Philosophers are not able to help, as they act as mere critics, but do not show any creativity. Artistic producers, like movie directors or writers have not achieved a determined position to be considered the voice of humanism in the society. Humanism wanders in ways of anonymity.

To sum up this situation, I find it may very useful to consider the verses of Machado (1919):

Hasta que el pueblo las canta,
las coplas coplas no son,
y cuando las canta el pueblo,
ya nadie sabe el autor.

Tal es la gloria, Guillén,
de los que escriben cantares:
oír decir a la gente
que no los ha escrito nadie.

Procura tú que tus coplas
vayan al pueblo a parar,
aunque dejen de ser tuyas
para ser de los demás.

Que al fundir el corazón
en el alma popular,
lo que se pierde de nombre
se gana de eternidad.

The main problem is that this kind of humanism lives under a continual tension and instability, created by its necessity of self determination, and sometimes there are political or social interests that put the results into a determined direction.

The Future of Humanities in Spain

I strongly believe that, in spite of the complexity of the situation, the future is hopeful. Other times in the past were worse. Even if it is true that the current society is divided and sometimes separated, this can be a reason for trying to choose a better selection of politicians in the area of cultural and social leaders.

And, what is more important, the nation has to judge by acceptin or denying the offer of these leaders. The only problem is that there are very few people in our society who are conscious about humanism, and requisite popular control of cultural movements. This has always been the main risk of the humanities, and it is the fact that makes it fragile. The only necessary thing is not to break it. So, the only way is to be conscious of the fact that the world needs humanism is for we, the people, to become responsible for its preservation.

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Elena González-Blanco was born in Murcia (Spain) in 1981. She moved to Madrid to study Spanish Philology (Graduated in 2004) and Classics (Graduated in 2005) at the Universidad Complutense de Madrid. After that she worked in the CSIC (Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas). She has recently moved to Harvard to work on her Dissertation about the origins and parallels between the Cuaderna Via poetry and its counterparts in French and Italian Medieval literature. She has also studied music (piano and viola), and danced Spanish and classic ballet.

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