

REVIEW

The Anglo-American Tradition of Liberty: A View From Europe

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As a European political theorist and former advisor to Portugal's President Soares, Espada brings a unique perspective to the analysis of the Anglo-American tradition of liberty, which he views as worthy of both study and emulation. As far back as Montesquieu, continental writers have remarked upon the admirable political achievement of England, and later, the United States. This is the tradition that blends liberty with orderly institutions that integrate diverse activities and beliefs under the rule of law while reconciling civil conflicts and political competition in predictable ways. The book stands out from typical scholarly fare in discussing the author's personal intellectual development and friendships with various thinkers, some of whom are the subjects of the book's chapters. Espada also briefly mentions his own political activity. In a recognition of the intergenerational character of liberal learning, Espada also notes the impact of the various texts discussed on his own students in their intellectual development. This slender volume, then, is personal, political, and philosophical; with hints of an intellectual autobiography, it analyzes a tradition of thought with a view to resuscitating it, and encourages Europeans to engage with it in the present.

A tradition has been called a 'flow of sympathy'. This book is the eliciting and elucidation of a sympathy, described, in a saying of Popper's as the gentlemanly quality of not taking oneself too seriously, while simultaneously taking one's duties very seriously, especially "when most around him speak only about their rights" (p. 2). Stated this way, it sounds like an unusual approach to governing, which is usually thought to involve grand ideas, major institutions, and large-scale actions. But the point of this book is, in a sense, to implore us to consider that not taking oneself too seriously is in fact the very essence of governing in a free society. Quoting from a conversation with Isaiah Berlin, about the many dissidents who had emigrated to or been exiled in Britain:

They were allowed to live and express their views in this country. Britain has always been a tolerant country. They acknowledged this, but most of them used to complain that the English did not take them seriously. Now I ask you: is this not, somehow, a condition of toleration? I mean, if you start taking everyone and everything terribly seriously, can you actually continue to tolerate them as much as if you simply live and let live? (p. 75).

The book reads as a graceful extended essay rather than a dry treatise, and does not pretend to critically exhaust its subjects. In just two hundred pages, it covers Karl Popper, Ralf Dahrendorf, Raymond Plant, Gertrude Himmelfarb, Irving Kristol, Raymond Aron, Federich Hayek, Isaiah Berlin, Michael Oakeshott, Leo Strauss, Edmund Burke, James Madison, Alexis de Tocqueville, and Winston Churchill. There are other figures, brought in as foils and critics as well—Madison contra Rousseau, for example, and Crans-ton contra Plant. Instead of an exhaustive treatise, it builds a case for a kind of political ecumenism based around what Espada argues is a salutary understanding of political order. In pointing out that adherence to the tradition of Anglo-American liberty is consistent with various political affiliations and intellectual orientations, Espada is surely correct. The variety of authors he has included shows that while the tradition may be Anglo-American it is available to anyone who understands it. It is an intellectual tradition, not one owned solely by the English or the Americans.

In handling the diverse group of thinkers he has assembled, Espada emphasizes certain themes that allow us to see this sympathy for Anglo-American liberty as a sort of tableau. He stresses Popper's fallibilism and critique of 'dogmatic rationalism'; Dahrendorf's criticisms of utopianism and defense of civil society; Plant's theory of basic needs is warmly treated, but his redistributionism is criticized; with

Kristol and Himmelfarb, we get attention to the moral underpinnings of a free society, something arguably neglected in certain accounts. Similarly, we see Burke's attack on the extreme rationalism of the French revolutionaries and his liberality toward the Irish and Americans; Madison's embrace of a skeptical and limited politics; Oakeshott and Hayek on general, non-instrumental law and open economies; and Tocqueville's admiration of the intricacies of the US Constitution born of skepticism about the ultimate scope of political action.

Espada invites the reader to transcend partisan differences and explore the shared political sympathies that support a tradition of liberty. But this brings up an important point. At the risk of overplaying similarities, Espada urges us to recognize that there is a manner of thinking about both the grand theoretical issues of political philosophy and the more mundane activities of arranging and sustaining institutions that comprehends a wide breadth of competing political parties and positions. The Anglo-American tradition as he sees it, can accommodate most of the important differences in European and Anglo-American political parties, and provide them a better overall field of debate in which to work. And Espada never seems unaware of the important differences between his subjects.

A tension in the work comes from its interweaving of the personal, political, and philosophical. At times Espada argues directly from theoretical concerns to political ones, or from political to philosophical concerns. But the breadth and variety of authors he has marshaled suggest that theory and politics definitely do not blend and support one another in a straightforward way. There are important differences between these authors philosophically—deductivism, empiricism, idealism, natural law, deism. And more than one of them explicitly questions whether theory can directly inform practice. Yet this has not kept them from either recognizing the value of liberty, or seeing liberty's enemies clearly.

The book's triple structure—personal, political, philosophical—shows in its organization. First, Popper, Dahren-dorf, Plant, and Himmelfarb and Kristol, called "Personal Influences," are either Espada's direct teachers or colleagues and friends. It is in these leading chapters that we find the major part of Espada's own story and development, including the anecdote that reveals Karl Popper's deep and abiding appreciation for Churchill, who, according to Popper, "literally saved Western civilization" (p. 2). Next, Aron, Hayek, Berlin, Oakeshott, and Strauss are called the "Cold Warriors." Oakeshott, for one, insisted so firmly on the sep-

aration of theory and practice that he might spin a little in his grave to hear the appellation, and this is not a particularly *engagé* group of thinkers. However, they all did see the evils of totalitarianism and in various ways rose to oppose it, unlike some other notorious twentieth century intellectuals. These thinkers were brought to Espada's attention by those he met personally or studied under; and so, while the book opens in scope to more renowned figures, it remains reflective of Espada's own journey. Finally, "Orderly Liberty" treats a trio of major thinkers in classical liberalism, Burke, Madison, and Tocqueville. The Madison chapter, the only comparative one, unfavorably compares Rousseau's unlimited theory of general will with Madison's theory of limited government. In addition, Rousseau's name occurs in several places, ever-ready to force people to be free; thus lurking as a *bête noir* of the liberal tradition.

The triple structure is also reflected in how these thinkers are treated. The "Personal Influences" are introduced to us through sketches that give us revealing glimpses of these scholar's lives, attitudes, and, in some cases, political roles. The author's acquaintances and friendships with them are noted not for name-dropping effect, but rather to show their generosity of spirit and convey Espada's gratitude for their guidance. It is the kind of thing that normally remains in the secret history of a scholar's life, known only through the grapevine. The significance of discussing it openly is to stress the importance of learning from concrete individuals, and sharing in a common endeavor to understand political life. Learning comes conversationally. These figures' biographies relate, in various ways, to their staunch anti-totalitarian views. And, Espada analyzes their most critical philosophical contributions and suggests how these relate to their defense of liberty.

While Espada never met the "Cold Warriors," he recounts the personal effect of studying their work, at what stages of his life he did so; and, touches upon how his students respond to their teachings. Here, too, he covers the key points such as Oakeshott's distinct views of rationalism and of law, Hayek's views on spontaneous order, and Strauss' critique of modernity. Unfortunately, in a slender volume such as this, more extensive treatment of, for example, how Oakeshott and Popper's views of Rationalism differed, or what Popper would have thought of Strauss' historiography, have to be left to another occasion.

For the thinkers in "Ordered Liberty," the treatment is again partly personal, focusing on their significance for the author's own intellectual development, but primarily on how Espada's students respond to them, while cover-

ing the critical issues such as the nature of political association, the importance of balanced and blended institutions, and the value of tradition not as a past standard to be raised again, but as a present inheritance of available intellectual and cultural resources. Montesquieu never gets a chapter to himself, but does appear in several places as a keen and appreciative observer of the English system, and there are a number of cameos that tease the broader story of Anglo-American liberty as a strand of our shared European inheritance: Guizot, Halévy, Gellner, Shills, Constant, Quinton, and others, including usual suspects like Hobbes and Pascal.

It is, of course, far too short a book to do full justice to even the thirteen or so main subjects. To ask it to seek out deeper springs of modern liberty would be unfair. Espada's focus is on post-French Revolutionary sources. Interestingly, under consideration here are a collection of heavyweight opponents of the extremism that emerged from it, and, we can guess by implication, of the inspiration that that cataclysm has given to generations of immoderate and extreme political movements continuing to this day. The absence of older authors, though, cuts off a full sense of the tradition on which these later authors depend. In the case of Britain in particular, there is a nearly millennium long practical tradition of political conduct and the common law, which supports the sympathies explored here, even when elements of that practical tradition can be formulated theoretically. For its variety of its subjects, and for the way it weaves in the personal and political, this book would be an excellent resource to introduce undergraduates to the Anglo-American tradition, especially if accompanied by materials going deeper into the tradition, to convey that modern Anglo-American liberty rests on more than opposition to Rationalistic extremism.

The book also has a major chapter on Winston Churchill, in addition to the Introduction, which notes Popper's reverence for him. He is not treated as a theorist but rather as a more or less perfect embodiment of the Anglo-American tradition of ordered liberty. Churchill's political success in leading Britain in the Second World War comes largely from his rootedness in his own tradition and culture. Espada rebuts the crude notion of Churchill as someone who stumbled into British politics only to save the day half accidentally, by pointing out he was very much a member of the Establishment, attended the best schools where he got a deep education in the Anglo-American tradition and British culture generally, and had deep familial connections to British political life.

The later chapters aim to be synthetic and cumulative, bringing together the various issues surveyed in these thirteen thinkers. Unfortunately, these sections are marred by the outright repetition of certain passages earlier in the book, which robs this brief work of potential depth. The book ends in its political mode, with an examination of the question of Brexit—written a couple of years before what we have now seen happen—and offers practical, if still very general advice on how Europe and Europeans would benefit from becoming a bit more Anglo-American in their approach to European integration. It is a striking hypothesis and an unusual defense of the European project. In essence, Espada argues that in matters such as Brexit, the European Commission and member states could be more tolerant of difference within a legal structure that allows a meaningful degree of subsidiarity. In particular, he cites Dahrendorf's 1990 work *Reflections on the Revolution in Europe*, and its distinction between normal politics and constitutional politics as highly important. From Dahrendorf: "In matters of constitutional politics there are...only two ways, the closed or the open society, whereas in normal politics a hundred options may be on offer, and three or four usually are" (p. 195). Dahrendorf's idea is brought in to bolster European support for a generally open society, within which there can be robust debate—provided extreme rationalism is expunged (pp. 197, 199).