

WE SPEAK BY MEANS OF OUR WORDS, BUT NOT BY MEANS OF OUR ACTIONS

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Education cannot avoid the influence of this new-world postmodern society as the former is intrinsically embedded in and surrounded by the latter. The philosophical doctrine or axiomatic principle of postmodern society, namely the constant pursuit and overestimation of economic success or short-term profit to the detriment of both critical thinking and imagination development brings as a consequence a clear hierarchy of pedagogical priorities in schools and universities' curricula. Science-and-technology-based subjects seem to outdo humanity subjects (literature, philosophy, arts, history) in their immediately tangible contribution to economic growth, 'therefore' in their pedagogical importance. It is as though there would not be any place for humanities in the so-called 'knowledge society'. In this constant-pursuit-for-economic-growth context, and upon reading Martha Nussbaum's book called "Not For Profit", I do believe there exists a world silent crisis ('silent' in the sense that nobody seems to be aware of it) of the social-humanistic paradigm, which inherently leads to a deeper crisis of moral values, posing a threat to democracy itself.

Undoubtedly, there is a mistaken belief which, though built on a logically-acceptable reasoning, is wrongly supported in a false premise, namely that subjects directly leading to economic success are to be directly corresponded with their pedagogical importance. As Nussbaum states: "parents all over the world are more likely to fret if their children are financially illiterate than if their training in the humanities is deficient." This kind of conception on education can often be seen in our country, having consequences for students on the choice of university's courses of studies.

In this light, the current disregard for the value of the humanities is largely due to two beliefs: first, that the humanities contribute little to economic growth; and second, that human well-being depends primarily on such growth. In my opinion, both beliefs are false. The first one ignores how much economic growth depends on creativity, innovation, critical thinking and even the possession of background knowledge and broad understanding, as opposed to the merely instrumental rationality and technical proficiency emphasized by programs of career-oriented practical training. This simplistic perspective neglects the fact that innovation requires minds that are flexible, open and creative; and it is precisely literature, history, philosophy and the arts that cultivate these capacities. But it is the second belief that is most fundamentally mistaken. The well-being of an individual does not solely depend on economic, materialistic growth but also, and in fact more importantly, it depends on the full development of oneself as a responsible, critical citizen. The very axis and support for democracy itself.

A responsible citizenship requires from their citizens the ability to assess historical evidence, to use and think critically about economic principles, to compare differing views on social justice and to appreciate the complexities of the major world religions, avoiding the traditional ethnocentric perspective. In terms of Nussbaum: "to imagine sympathetically the predicament of another person." When we acknowledge the dignity of others, even those whose actions or existence bother us, we make an important step towards an inclusive and

liberal frame of mind, essential for the survival and reassurance of democracy as a liberal form of government.

Especially in our country, public opinion despises humanities and often believes them to be useless. This idea seems to be reflected on the shift of curricular content from material that focuses on enlivening imagination (which mainly allows us to see the world from a different perspective, acknowledging the 'otherness' and seeing other individuals as equals) and training the critical faculties, towards material that is directly relevant to preparation for tests. Along with this shift in content, there has come a shift in pedagogy: from teaching that seeks to promote questioning and individual responsibility towards force-feeding for good exam results. We study to 'pass' and not to 'learn'.

All in all, I believe the seeming dichotomy between humanities and the thirst for national profit is wrongly based on a misconception of the latter. National profit, in its purest sense, should be based primarily on humanities as they broaden our minds, fostering critical thinking and imagination, constituting the core values for an individual to grow and develop, both as a professional and as a responsible, critical citizen. National profit and humanities mutually entail each other, there is no need whatsoever to build a Manichean opposition between them.

Today, we still maintain and praise democracy and self-governance, and we claim for freedom of speech, respect for differences, and understanding of others. But we are not deeply concerned with what we need to do in order to support them in practice. That is, as it usually happens, we speak by means of our words but not by means of our actions.