

Euroethos

The trial against the magazine *Charlie Hebdo* commenced in French courts on February 7th, and prolongs the controversy that flared up in September 2005 concerning the cartoons of Muhammad after their publication in the Danish newspaper *Jyllands*. This trial highlights once again the need to formulate a *Euroethos*, a European character by which to seek political and economic integration.

That is how it must have been understood by those in charge, and that is why one of the projects financed by the European Union in its Sixth Framework Program, and directed by Michele Nicoletti, is called “*Euroethos. Exploring the Scope for a Shared European Pluralistic Ethos*”. If Europe wants to be built as a *knowledge-based society*, it has to know, among other things, whether it shares a common character by which to orient politics and economics, or whether this is not the case.

Maybe the title chosen is not the most appropriate, as Greek terms such as *ethos* have a deterrent quality in a culture that, unfortunately, has turned its back on classical studies. But it is difficult to express better in one single word that Europe must understand itself, it must know whether it has a character, some ways of life, that constitute its peculiar manner of inhabiting the global context. In this sense it must follow the recommendation made to business in a globalised world: in times of maximum uncertainty, if the company lacks knowledge about its identity, if it does not know who it is or what its aims are, it will lose even at the most basic level, which is the profit-and-loss account. But how can it recognise its own ethical identity, when it is precisely a morally plural society?

A good method consists of investigating which protests arise from the different groups, and their echoes in the media and the courts, and see whether the values that give rise to those protests have a place in that moral identity: the incident with the cartoons of Muhammad; clashes with the Islamic veil, with crosses or nativity scenes in state schools; the problem of blood transfusions in the case of Jehovah’s Witnesses; the demand for Koran-allowed food for Muslims; the Sikhs’ insistence on wearing turbans instead of helmets; the requests to be exempt from work on certain dates, and other issues that unleash controversy.

If the economy alone, as some say, were to govern the destiny of the world, those problems would be solved. For example, in Europe, there already exist foods, cosmetics

and medicines that have been manufactured in accordance with Islam's requirements: they are already *halal*, permitted under their religious rules. It is true that it is difficult to designate some sort of authority that checks whether apparently allowed products have been manufactured following those rules. But that is the kind of problem that does not take long to solve: if there is strong economic interest, a solution is found. In the end, it is a new version of food for vegetarians, or for those with high "bad" cholesterol, or for diabetics. The secret is to find enough consumers to make the product a profitable business.

And that is the way normally used in what Hegel, using more beautiful terms, called "the struggle for recognition". Also, in the public sphere, we want our personal, religious, sexual, or political identity to be recognized, and it seems that the usual way is by fighting, protesting, and demanding. A bitter way, if there is any, and not only because many fall in the meantime, but also because only those who gain *enough power* to reach their goal finally do. *Economic power*, when they reach a number that is high enough to be paid attention to, or they receive enough funding from foundations or more or less transparent organizations. *Political power*, because, what party would reject a good amount of votes that could end up tipping the scales in someone's favour? And also the *political power* of those who are well located enough in a new "war of positions", as to have the necessary influence. The rest, the ones without power, even if they are a majority, are left out.

But this is not the path to recognition of differences that Europe should follow, if it believes in those values and rights that were expressed in the beginning of the Constitutional Treaty; a treaty that, luckily, Angela Merkel wants to relaunch, and I hope she is successful in that. Recognizing the rights of those who have power, in the end simply because they do have it, means renouncing our most basic values.

That is why it is advisable to pick up again that classical idea of a *complex citizenship* that is formulated taking in account what is common among the citizens, and also their legitimate differences. Not just any differences, since the members of the Ku-Klux-Klan, of ETA or of Al Qaeda have their peculiarities, but I trust we will not admit them as good. Not all differences are respectable; some deserve more respect than others. But, what should we do with those who do deserve it? Do they, because of that, form a part of our way of life?

Answering this question correctly would require us to address a wide range of topics which we cannot go into now. But what we can do is remember that a moral identity, such as the one of the European Union, is a definition which that entity must be able to develop over the course of its history, and which it also must be able to redefine again and again. Identity is not established once and for all, but rather it is continuously redeveloped, and it is also depends on two different elements: the recognition it receives from others, and the capacity it has to negotiate with itself and the environment.

From where? From the values and rights of the Constitutional Treaty, which arise from the respect for human dignity, made up of freedom, democracy, equality, pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, equality between men and women, minority rights, rule of law and respect for human rights, among which the civil and political rights are included, and last but not least economic, social, and cultural rights. This is the breeding ground of the *Euroethos*, never the pure pressure of those who have power in the fight for recognition.

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