

August 25, 2016

A letter to my Chilean colleagues:

I'm writing to express my dismay at the proposal offered by Chile's Ministry of Education, to remove the field of philosophy from the core curriculum required nationally of secondary school students—and to stand in solidarity with those of you, friends and colleagues, who are working to oppose the measure's implementation. I write to you as an educator who teaches philosophy and literature at the University, but also as a scholar who has had occasion to collaborate closely with and to publish the work of Chilean philosophers, and who has had the privilege of getting to know and working with Chilean undergraduate and graduate philosophy students. The training they have received is without peer: rigorous, broad, imaginative, open—in short, the highest example of the sort of “critical thinking” the Chilean Ministry of Education claims to want to promote, but is, on the evidence of this ill-conceived proposal, seeking instead to undermine. The argument the Ministry makes is patently contradictory: to remove the study of philosophy, as taught by faculty educated in the field, in the name of encouraging “critical thought.” Something else lies behind this contradiction: the desire to subordinate “critical thought” to the thought of the marketplace.

I profess in a country that has succeeded in driving philosophy into the darkest and least frequented corners of the University. The results for the political culture in the United States are sadly on display in the current election: a general incapacity to think critically about the rise of the extreme right; the resurgence of racist, xenophobic, isolationist policies and candidates; a blind and uninformed embrace of the most savage individualism; the primacy of the market. It is not that the absence of the subject of philosophy from the educational system has *caused* these shocking events in the United States—but that its absence has helped make impossible a sustained civic engagement with the root causes of these malignant phenomena. If this is the direction in which Chile's political class wishes to take the country, they should have the courage to tell their citizens what their goals truly are. Only a deepening of a country's philosophical culture can shape civic discourse so it will stand the dismal wave of globalization flowing from Chicago, New York, Beijing, and the European Union.

All my very best,  
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