

Some Readings

By Luis Rubio, President, Centre of Research for Development (CIDAC), Mexico City
(English translation of article in Spanish published by *INFOLATUM*, December 25, 2016)

The beautiful thing about libraries, about books, is that they are like cherries. You finish one, and this leads to others, which end up leading you inevitably.

Arturo Pérez Reverte

In 2012, very much in his style, Charles Murray published a provocation that turned out to be predictive of Trump's victory. In *Coming Apart*, he devotes himself to analyzing a theme that had concerned him for many years: that of the inequality and public policies that tend to exacerbate it. In previous publications he had looked down upon tedious and politically incorrect terrains such as that of intelligence and the IQ as significant factors in social polarization. In *Coming Apart* he describes this as the population tending to polarize itself and to aggravate the problem: according to Murray, those that are successful in society have come to concentrate themselves geographically and with respect to activities, to the degree that they eventually live in a bubble that separates them from the rest of society: they watch different television programs, read different literature, go to other schools and are increasingly less similar to the remainder of the population. Murray's argument throughout his career has been that public policies designed to wage war on poverty and reduce social gaps have been a failure because they do not strike at the heart of the problem and often exacerbate it. In 2016 he published an interactive questionnaire that allows to determine how close a person is to the median American, that is, how similar an individual is to the majority. Although the questionnaire is ethnocentric and not easily applicable to Mexico, it is worthwhile responding to because it is highly instructive: <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/rundown/white-educated-and-wealthy-congratulations-you-live-in-a-bubble/>

Ronald W. Dworkin is a physician and philosopher who has made inroads into matters of public policy, first those related with health and recently with a book entitled *How Karl Marx Can Save American Capitalism*. Dworkin's premise is not new, but it is highly interesting: Marx was an enemy of capitalism but, on exhibiting its defects and limitations, he forced governments to respond, above all in issues such as the abuse of workers and the need for social policies, as well as an integral health system. At present, says Dworkin, there are new risks that, although distinct in nature from those that capitalism underwent in the XIX century, constitute a new challenge to its survival. Among these, Dworkin cites matters such as social alienation, decreasing birth rates, and the use of drugs for functioning in work life. While the concrete proposals that Dworkin suggests have nothing to do with Marx, what seems relevant to me about this book is its notion that liberal and conservative dogmatisms are useless for solving the problems of

today. Specifically, he proposes that the government focus itself, with laser-like precision, on threats to private life without attempting against the factors that permit the good functioning of a market economy.

Anthony de Jasay is a Hungarian economist and philosopher who migrated to Australia and now lives in France. His book, *The State*, begins with an extraordinary question: What would you do if you were the State? It is customary, says Jasay, to conceive of the State as an instrument, a means that exists to achieve the common good. However, the author asks, What if we were to suppose that the State has its own ends that are not those of the population? Jasay formulates a lengthy response that follows the history of the State from its original function, with exceedingly modest dimensions, as protector of life and property, until it converts itself into the “agile seducer of democratic majorities, to the welfare-dispensing drudge that it is in many countries today”; he then asks “Is the rational next step a totalitarian enhancement of its power?” *The State* presents a debatable extrapolation but not an irrelevant or illogical one.

Richard Epstein is a U.S law professor who has been writing for decades on the Constitution of his country. This year he published his masterpiece, *The Classical Liberal Constitution*, in which he delves into the origin and nature of the United States Constitution and analyzes the manner in which it has evolved over time. Beyond the properly U.S. debates that he treats throughout the book, what appears unsurpassable to me are his reflections on how the nature of the government has been changing, its objectives and the values that, in fact, give it life. Its main proposal is that protections of individual rights have been reduced without solving the essential problems of contemporary society. A profound believer in small and demarcated government, Epstein touches upon many of the themes that invigorate the work of Murray but from a constitutional perspective. His central assertion is that only firm and decided protection of individual rights before the State, guaranteed by the Supreme Court, can create the conditions for economic revitalization. Somewhat in contrast with Murray, his contention is not ideological but rather fundamentally pragmatic: it seems obvious to him that the status quo, while it worked before, does not now. That, notes Epstein, should be enough of a lesson.

www.cidac.org

@Irubiof