

**Prof. João Carlos Espada** is the director, but also the founder of the Institute of Political Studies at the Catholic University of Portugal, where he teaches political studies.

He is also the very busy editor of the quarterly journal *Nova Cidania* and a member of the Editorial Board of the *Journal of Democracy*.

Today, we are honoured to receive him to discuss his latest book – *The Anglo-American Tradition of Liberty: A View from Europe* – which came out last year published by Routledge.

I like this title because it describes Prof. Espada rather well.

Let me explain:

He has an intimate knowledge of Britain – where he studied for his PhD at the University of Oxford – and of the USA, where he taught at Brown, Stanford, and Georgetown Universities.

He also has an intimate view of Europe as from 2011 until 2014, he held the European Parliament / Geremek European Civilisation Chair at the College of Europe in Warsaw.

And finally, he has an intimate view of Portugal where he served as political advisor to two Portuguese presidents, Mário Soares (1986–1990) and Anibal Cavaco Silva (2006–2011).

Therefore, if this book's subtitle explains that this will be a "A view from Europe" of what he refers to as the Anglo-American Tradition of Liberty, I think it would be fairer to say that it is both an outsider's view and an insider's of this special tradition of liberty.

Interestingly, it was written in Oxford, at Brown and Stanford Universities, in Warsaw and also in Portugal. And as we are about to discover that all the authors studied are not only Anglo-American.

It is truly a personal intellectual journey into how a distinctive Anglo-American tradition of liberty – which is difficult to pinpoint – is at the heart of the success of our liberal democracies.

I believe it is rather fitting that Joao Carlos Espada should be presenting his book here today in order for us to consider together the differences between the Anglo-American tradition and the Continental understanding of Liberty, at a time when our liberal democracies are challenged by different types of populism (either from the right or from the left of the political spectrum).

But now the time has come for me to let our guest present his "delightful book" to use the expression that Timothy Garton-Ash used to describe it when he reviewed it.

-----

This allows me to start the discussion tonight and I will do so, looking into three important aspects which come out of your presentation : firstly, the methodology you used, secondly, the intertwined role of education, discussion and religion, and thirdly, the survival of this Anglo-American tradition of political liberty in our Liberal Democracies, in the context of Brexit especially?

## **1. Methodology**

First, I would like to ask you about the methodology you chose for writing the book. You put it in very Burkean terms, when you describe how the book “emerged” much more than being built in a rational way.

I was struck how this expression fitted what you were defending: essentially that this tradition of liberty is complicated to analyse openly, that you had to go about it in roundabout ways to analyse it in the thoughts of many authors and that you had to retrieve it with many different tools.

This is not a history of Anglo-American Political Liberty; it is much more a history of the thinkers who defended what it meant to be politically free in an Anglo-American way.

The journey, one feels, – of the thinkers you analyse and your own personal journey – is nearly as important as the goal. And this is what gives it a form of romantic Oakeshotian flavour which is nostalgic of a certain way of thinking politics.

I was wondering if as the book was emerging you ever questioned yourself, at one stage in the process, about the methodology you wanted to adopt or if you decided to feel totally free of such constraints knowing that you would probably be questioned in your choice of Leo Strauss for example. If “perennial questions” are essential for Strauss in his love of the ancients’ wisdom, they do not sit easily with Raymond Plant’s way of doing political history for example – even if you show how you revisited your views on Lord Plant in his chapter.

This is important because there is a freedom of writing in the book which goes from the writers you knew personally and who had a major impact on your thoughts to those whom you chose because each had a way of defending a particular kind of strand of the Anglo-American tradition of liberty.

Amazingly though, even though you do mention them a little, John Stuart Mill and Walter Bagehot are not as present as expected as essential defenders of this liberty and I was also wondering why?

## **2. The role of education into political discussion, conversation and religion in the Anglo-American tradition ?**

This leads me into my second part. If you show how a certain liberal education strengthened by religion, allows proper political discussion – and government by debate – those who know you, are very aware that this is what has been the spirit of your life.

Your liberal education – in its most noble 19<sup>th</sup> century sense – was given to you mainly in Britain and America and you used it to create the Institute of Political Studies of the Catholic University of Lisbon where two generations of young scholars have followed the same liberal education you were given.

You carried on too with the creation of the now famous Estoril Political Forum which takes place each June in Estoril, bringing together more than 200 political scientists, historians, philosophers, economists, leaders of think tanks, politicians and all the students of the Political Institute to debate the burning issues of our time over 3 days in a very civilised atmosphere – even if people do disagree – conducive to the best exchanges.

How did your dreams to teach political liberty in Lisbon come about? How do you keep this Anglo-American tradition of liberty – mostly pluralistic, adaptive, accepting differences and always favouring incremental moves – alive in our rather dogmatic university systems, in which you are expected to have a rational value ?

Reading your book was like a window into your education and the conversation you have had with all these thinkers since the 1980s. I was also struck by the role of Providence, for lack of a better word – of a certain guided path – which has led you where you were supposed to be even though you had free-will in doing so.

Therefore I ask myself about the link between a liberal education, faith and the capacity for conversation. Accepting different points of views, debating away from utopian ideals – which can lead to revolutionary outbursts – mean that the political conversations about the nature of political liberty should be led by people who can speak the same language.

It entails that they have a same political education to speak to each other and not *past* each other. It also means that they have faith that a real conversation can solve any problem – because such should be the point of politics – not that all problems can be solved but that imperfection and adaptive solutions can be found through an enlightened discussion.

Fundamentally, the Anglo-American tradition of liberty is better at promoting its citizens' well-being because it is more honest in its shortcomings and its belief that muddling-through can be much more useful than a rational coherent design. But this raises a set of new questions and..

### **3. The survival of the Anglo-American tradition today in the context of the state of liberal democracies?**

... leads me to my third part. By whom should the book be read? One feels that there is a desire to transmit to other generations the experience of the benefit of such a liberal education but I also felt a form of nostalgia reading in it as if something has been lost along the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

So my last question is: where did things go wrong in bringing up free individuals in favour of this tradition of Liberty? The transmission of this spirit is not very much alive and present liberal democracies are challenged by both populism and new totalitarian regimes (today, social media could be even considered as a form of self-imposed despotism).

The idea of having time to have a liberal discussion, under the rule of law – let alone to “waste” time being educated into it – is not exactly flavour of the day.

How can this be done today when the globalised world splits responsibilities and when liberal democracies are no longer seen as the best way to deal with rampant inequalities?

Eventually, what I take from your last chapter is that the way out is to infuse nobility (some would say an aristocratic disposition) into the waning democratic spirit: but this is problematic. It means recognizing that some should be trained into a liberal education in a meritocratic way, that faith in such a new generation of leaders would generate a form of egalitarian deference to politics and that imperfection should be embraced as a journey towards a solution.

This also entails that the Continental spirit of Liberty – which is much more rationally designed and utopian – needs to adapt to such a way of thinking.

And I wonder what to make of Brexit here?

Lastly, and this my ultimate question, can the continental “constitution” of the peoples of Europe embrace such a change which is neither in their nature nor in their history? Are you not – like me and certainly many others here today – a liberal alien on the wrong side of the channel, or on the wrong-size of the Atlantic?