
TOPICAL REVIEW

PHILOSOPHY AND THOUGHT IN LATIN AMERICA

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UNTIL JUST RECENTLY IT WOULD HAVE BEEN BOTH FUTILE AND ABSURD TO speak of American Philosophy, especially if that implied a reference to philosophy in Latin America. However, the subject was introduced and those concerned with whether or not such a philosophy existed have become even more vocal in the past few years. The nature of their preoccupation implicitly raised another, broader question: Is it possible to speak in terms of an American culture—where “American” is not simply a geographical indication but an expression of the presence of something basic to Latin American thought? Is there something “American” in a sense which would correspond to the significance this word for Bolívar, San Martín, Hidalgo, Morelos, Sucre, O’Higgins and many other notable leaders since who continually referred to America—her culture, her people and her philosophy?

The present encounter with contemporary philosophy, largely promoted within the Spanish speaking world by José Ortega y Gasset, has made it possible for Latin American thought to take a good look at itself; to uncover meaning in a way of thinking which is both systematic and philosophical. The Uruguayan, Arturo Ardao, was referring to this situation when he wrote:

We see by the relationship which exists between contemporary historicism and the current preoccupation with the authenticity of American philosophy that this preoccupation in itself has led to the study of past philosophies in America. Historicism today, like the writings of Hegel during the nineteenth century, has been directly or indirectly responsible for a vast movement in this field. Seen from such an angle, the history of philosophy in America takes on essential importance not only because it reveals original systems or doctrines but because it lays bare the play of ideas and circumstances which were instrumental in developing a spirit.

Thus new light is shed upon a system whose meaning had previously escaped the notice of those scholars given to the mere repetition of concepts and philosophical patterns as if divorced from Latin American reality. No one questions the universal nature of European philosophy. Latin American thought simply makes its original contribution or, in the words of Ardao, "it adds something of its own, with equally universal qualities."¹

These qualities to which Ardao makes reference are those to be found in a group of people who, having become conscious of their maturity, feel the need to express it by setting out in search of solutions to the problems which confront them from day to day; problems arising from specific circumstances whose resolutions demand more than the adoption or repetition of already formulated answers. The Latin American philosopher was faced with the inevitable task of transforming and modifying previous solutions, adjusting them to the reality of his present situation. There was no time to originate entire systems. America, since gaining her political independence, had never known the leisure so necessary for such a creation. Those who had begun by freeing their people from the hold of Thomism were then obligated to find a replacement in other philosophies which, hopefully, would give meaning and justification to their desires. To provide for mental as well as political liberation was the ideal of Sarmiento and Alberdi in Argentina; Bilbao and Lastarria in Chile; Montalvo in Ecuador; José María Luis Mora in Mexico; Eduardo Ferreira Franca in Brazil; Varela and José de la Luz y Caballero in Cuba and Andrés Bello in Venezuela.

Having given the people their political independence or, at least, having put them on the way toward it, these leaders had to formulate a philosophy, not necessarily of metaphysical scope, but one which was practical and designed to handle the most immediate problems. And this was not all. As politicians, they found themselves in a position to advance solutions to these problems, or to create systems which would facilitate their proposal. They also had to educate those who would, in the future, take over the direction of their countries. In addition they were occasionally forced to leave their desks and enter into active defense of rights and liberties being threatened either from without or from within. There was neither the time nor the place to work out completely new philosophical systems. Dependence on schools and academies was an impossibility. Their philosophy sprang from the urgency of the circumstances conceived in public life, on the battle field, in exile or in prison. Patterns and ideas borrowed from a European model were modified to give rise to a philosophy whose true value can now be gauged from the perspective afforded by modern day historicism.

In order to combat Scholasticism and prepare for emancipation of the Iberian colonies, Latin American leaders armed themselves with the ideas of

Locke, Bacon, Copernicus, Kepler, Newton, Leibnitz, Franklin and the philosophers of the Enlightenment. The first matter of importance was to laud the flora, the fauna and the people of South America, almost as if by way of self-justification for the demand for equal rights which followed. The great naturalistic expeditions in Nueva España and Nueva Granada mark the beginning of what later became a rebellion in the name of national independence. It was, in fact, these same explorers—Javier Alegre, Diego José Abad and Francisco Clavijero in Mexico; Hipólito Unánue and José Baquijano in Peru; Francisco Xavier Espejo in Ecuador; Francisco Xavier de Caldas in Colombia; Francisco de Monte Alverne in Brazil—who, after completing their scientific disquisitions, turned to writing proclamations of liberty, exchanging instruments of investigation for those of war.

After independence, there arose the problem of establishing a political and social organization for the new nations. There was need for a philosophy upon which to base post-colonial order and handle such diverse immediate problems as employment, education and internal strife. Again Latin America would make use of Europe's philosophic arsenal. Bentham, James Mill, Saint Simon, Pierre Leroux, Lamennais, Quinet, Michelet, Victor Cousin, Jouffroy, Lermenier, Benjamin Constant, De Bonald, William Hamilton, Thomas Reid, Laromiguière and other representatives of ideology, eclecticism, romanticism, liberalism and traditionalism would furnish elements to aid a new generation of leaders to emerge from the dark alleys of their past and to contribute to the political and intellectual growth already begun.

Which philosophy was to be chosen? Just any one? Or perhaps one which was popular at the time? No. It had to be a philosophy providing for the needs of the people; one which directed attention to their problems and attempted to solve them. Concerning this selection, the Argentine, Juan Bautista Alberdi, wrote: "Every country, every generation, every philosopher has had his own philosophy. Each of these has spread and endured, to a greater or lesser degree, because it proposed different solutions to the problems of the human spirit." So it is that we speak of French, German, Greek and English philosophies. By the same token, "there should also be an American philosophy." As a beginning, Alberdi suggested the appropriate selection of existing doctrine which could be meaningfully accommodated to America's philosophic focus.

In the hope of being effective, we will sacrifice completeness and concern ourselves only with nineteenth century philosophy, eliminating from this what seems to be least applicable to the social needs of our country. For it is precisely the satisfaction of these needs which must dictate the contents of our philosophy.

Judged by such pragmatic standards, one system of thought would be accepted in place of another.

Could Kant, Hegel and the school of German idealism be of help to these new nations? "Nothing more foreign," says Alberdi, "than the spirit of northern European thought with which to introduce the tender minds of Latin Americans to the problems of philosophy." We should, instead, look to southern Europe:

to the land of our origin and our heritage, in whose intellectual initiative we have a right to share. We should not study philosophy for its own sake, but rather philosophy applied to an objective of immediate interest to us. In short, we should study political philosophy, philosophy of our economy and of our wealth, of our literature, of our religion, and of our history.

He concludes that ours must evolve like every other truly authentic philosophy before it: "as the result of the most pressing needs of the country and of the times."²

In Cuba, José de la Luz y Caballero (1800–1862) was also practicing a type of discrimination against Hegel, Schelling and Fichte. Though thoroughly familiar with their works, he chose not to speak of them to his young disciples. "No one could have plundered German thought more easily than I, and have made himself more famous for having brought her idealism to Latin America, but I felt it would have done us more harm than good." For the same reasons he was also intent upon driving out the influence of Victor Cousin—an influence perhaps healthy for other parts of Latin America, but not for Cuba, still without political freedom. "The practical consequences produced by such a philosophy would necessarily have been detrimental to the political progress of the world, and especially in Cuba where, because of the existence of slavery and other ultra-conservative political institutions, the effect of eclecticism as a system would have been felt much more strongly."³

To completely liberate the Spanish American people it was necessary to educate them in new ways of living and acquaint them with new forms of government. Our people, according to the Chilean, Francisco Bilbao (1823–1865), "know only what their families have taught them. The rest they reject. Their beliefs are Catholic and Spanish. We must educate them in the theory of individualism and teach them of their right to equality and honor."⁴ In short, they should be prepared for freedom; educated within a system defending that freedom and making it desirable to them.

Once again Europe provided the complex of philosophical premises which, by tempering the Latin American mind, could pave the way for the establishment of a new order believed to be compatible with liberty. In an America weakened internally by a lack of direction with respect to her future political and social organization, there was need for the mental discipline of a new philosophy. Gabino Barreda (1818–1881), responsible for much of the spread of Positivism in Mexico, believed that the doctrines of Comte, Mill and

Spencer could provide this discipline and serve as the basis for order. An organization built upon Positivism, he felt, would be accepted without question, as one accepts scientific truths—indisputable once they are understood. Adherence to such simple maxims as that of Benito Juárez (“Peace is synonymous with respect for the rights of others”) would put an end to the diverging opinions which divided the people and were leading them toward a state of anarchy. It was Barreda’s contention that “with the process of time, complete freedom of speech and of religion would so enlighten the people as to make impossible and unnecessary an uprising which was not spiritual, a revolution which was not intellectual. A material order, conserved at all cost by the governing and respected by the governed, is one way to assure movement in the direction of progress and civilization.”

According to Spencerian thought, if this type of order was not itself the expression of liberty, it was a certain guarantee of its attainment. Following this same line of thinking, Justo Sierra expressed his belief in the necessity for a strong administration similar to the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz:

I am thoroughly convinced that every society is an organism which, though clearly distinct from all others (Spencer called them ‘superorganisms’), has undeniable resemblance to the living organism. Societies, like animals, are subject to laws of evolution. According to these laws, all organisms obey processes of integration and differentiation, passing from the homogeneous to the heterogeneous; from the indefinite to the definite. Within a society, this movement is from social homogeneity to individual differentiation; from a state of maximum order to one of complete freedom.⁵

Sierra felt dictatorship was necessary to firmly establish habits of order so that an inevitable move toward political freedom would not result in anarchy.

In Argentina, as in almost every Latin American country, education in Positivism became the means by which future leaders were trained who could encourage their people along the path already laid out by the great nations of the world. And almost everywhere the writings of Comte, Spencer, Mill and Darwin were being adopted in one way or another. Argentine socialism, as seen in the works of Juan B. Justo and José Ingenieros, was virtually a combination of the doctrines of Marx and Spencer. In Brazil it was Positivism which had facilitated the change from an imperialistic regime to a republic.

But obviously this adoption alone was not enough to create or make possible the appearance of nations as prominent as their models in Europe and North America. Positivism was good in the sense that it gave Latin America an awareness of her existence, but not so good in as much as it advocated the rejection of those experiences which did not have the supposed certainty of the physical sciences. It was useful but insufficient.

With the beginning of the twentieth century, Latin American thinkers

began to doubt the effectiveness of this doctrine once believed to be the answer to their greatest problems. Even Justo Sierra said:

We are doubtful. If it is true that consciousness is nothing more than the systematic knowledge of the relative; if objects in themselves cannot be known and our only way of comprehending them is through their constant relationships; if this is true science, how can it not be in perpetual evolution, in perpetual discussion and strife?⁶

Positivism, as a tool, was helpful but inadequate. It could not solve the many problems which continued to face Latin Americans. The Uruguayan, José Enrique Rodó (1817–1917), once wrote: "By virtue of the fact that Positivism is the cornerstone of our intellectual edifice, it cannot possibly be the tower which crowns it."⁷ His compatriot, Carlos Vaz Ferreira (1872–1959), added:

If Positivism were understood to be the taking for certain only those facts proven as such, it would be a good philosophy; but it has also come to mean the systematic limitation of human knowledge to science alone. Positivism, in this sense, is a doctrine whose conception is inferior, whose effects are lamentable.⁸

At the same time, the Mexican, Antonio Caso (1883–1946), wrote: "It was probably wise for us to have substituted Scholasticism with the doctrines of Comte." But as it turned out, they too were useless. "It is not enough to form the intelligence. We must also develop the will."⁹

Still, all this did not mean completely doing away with the philosophy. It meant salvaging that part which could be of use and complementing it with other philosophies equally applicable and necessary. "We can go no further with Positivism," wrote the Argentine, Alejandro Korn (1860–1936), "nor can we abandon it. We must incorporate it as a subordinate element within a better system . . . Above all, man must be released from his servitude and returned to his position as a creator of culture, destined to perform in accordance with his intrinsic freedom. It is part of man's nature to put a higher value on life than an economic one."¹⁰ Positivism had only succeeded in justifying egoism in social groups, in giving rise to oligarchies and dictatorships which, in the name of progress, were trying to maintain their predominance at the expense of weaker groups.

Other philosophies were already appearing on the scene; philosophies which could perhaps complete the project undertaken to create nations and leaders of merit. Bergson, Boutroux, James, Nietzsche and others, accenting the concepts of the will, vitality and creative freedom, offered an alternative to the egoistic materialism which had been the unhappy result of positivistic thought. In the face of this egoism, Caso proposed charity, while another Mexican, José Vasconcelos (1882–1959), stressed the idea of life as an active process:

"Matter is perishable and, as such, tends to disappear; but life, the vital impulse which leads it, grows, creates and recreates."¹¹ To the Darwinian struggle for existence, Korn opposed the struggle for freedom: "It is the struggle for freedom, not the struggle for existence, which is the basic principle of all life; at every step, the latter is being sacrificed to the former." The motive behind this sacrifice of matter in the service of liberty, he adds, "we will call creative freedom."¹² The Peruvian, Alejandro O. Deústua (1849–1945), in a like manner subordinated material to creative freedom and called his a "philosophy of disinterested freedom."¹³ Rodó put the materialistic Calibán at the service of the goals of his spiritualistic Ariel. In all these instances, a new Latin American philosophy was revealing itself; a philosophy which would finally take into account the social problems of the people who had, for centuries, been neglected. An unvoiced dissatisfaction was making itself felt; the same uneasiness which was to find expression in the violence of the Mexican Revolution of 1910, and later in other movements of revenge throughout America.

It was time to begin looking again for a philosophy which could explain and offer solutions to these uprisings. Several of the leaders in Mexico had been inspired by Anarchism, Marxism and other socialistic doctrines without following any one of them literally. In Peru, as an antecedent to the Aprista movement, José Carlos Mariátegui introduced his ideas which were, in essence, the employment of Marxism to interpret Peruvian reality. "Our own solutions, our own doctrines, a philosophy of our own"—these were the concerns of men who would put an end to the social convulsions they had witnessed throughout the land. As Alejandro Korn wrote:

We live on handouts . . . waiting for the Word from far off to come and enlighten us so that we can face the problems of the present. And we are wrong to wait . . . We do not take a very respectable position when we expect someone else to solve our problems instead of working them out for ourselves. Why must we always live in compliance with someone else's thinking? . . . I do not wish to imply, however, that we should ignore developments in European culture, nor am I in favor of rejecting those influences which could be accommodated to our purposes.

After all, this would have been negating the approach of earlier Latin American philosophers. It was best to continue in the same direction, responsive to European problems as well as to our own. But was this philosophy? Was this what Plato, Aristotle, Saint Augustine, Descartes, Kant, Hegel—the great pillars of world philosophy—had done?

The concern with the possibilities of an American culture and, by way of a concrete expression of this, an American philosophy, became more acute in the twentieth century as a result of a combination of difficult historical, social

and cultural experiences in the immediate past and a feeling of isolation which the spiritual crises in Europe, evidenced by two world wars, had awakened in America.

Latin American thinkers were convinced that they needed a conceptual instrument with which to approach this situation. As before, it was not the philosophical problems of an abstract nature demanding analysis, but rather those with special pertinence to America. The questions remained as to which form European philosophy should assume in order to be most useful. As we have seen, this criterion came from Alberdi himself who, considering the choice to be made, had drawn attention to the necessity of abstracting those elements which could clearly serve the aims of Latin American countries.

"Do we really have our own philosophy?" Korn had asked himself. And he answered: "Is it possible that a human collectivity, united by common sentiments, interests and ideals, can develop without possessing some basic ideas, vague as they may be?" It is at the root of these ideas that one finds a philosophical position; that is, a philosophy. Korn hoped to uncover this position by searching through the history of philosophical influences in Argentina for a common denominator, a spirit which would account for the assimilation of these influences. In one way or another, the different philosophical trends adopted must have expressed the interests of the people. "Above all, there must be a common, national will. Then it is easy to find ideas to express it." One could always turn to the existing collection of man's ideas, ideologies and philosophies. In the last analysis, the basis for all creation is neither repetition nor imitation, but assimilation. Creating cannot imply taking something from nothing; it is a matter of combining and adapting what already exists to new circumstances.

We do not take a very respectable position when we expect someone else to solve our problems instead of working them out for ourselves. Why must we always live in compliance with someone else's thinking? Instead of being conscious of our past and recognizing our needs, we are still debating as to which European philosophy is the "true one."

While we should not isolate ourselves, ignoring what has been accomplished in other parts of the world, our main concern should be to formulate our own philosophy. "This means intensifying other philosophies, giving them new character, making them truly representative of our nation." Such was the aim of Sarmiento and Alberdi.

An American philosophy? The question posed by Alberdi and Korn came up again with renewed force after the second World War due to a feeling of abandonment on the part of Americans who witnessed the cultural crisis abroad. Europeans, now, could no longer consider themselves the sole source

of all culture. The shocking experiences of the war had shown them that their culture was but one among many, and they were but men among other men. Historicism, existentialism and other post-war philosophies tended to evaluate cultures relatively—a concept expressed as early as the 1920's by Spengler and echoed in Toynbee after World War II. This same attitude of relativism would later become a basic premise for such philosophers as Sartre and Heidegger. American philosophy? No, just philosophy; philosophy proposed by men in concrete human situations which, by their very nature, were potentially those of all men.

European philosophy, itself designed to reflect and handle immediate problems, was to support the determination among Latin American thinkers to adhere to systems with practical application to specific needs. The latest doctrines in Europe had all been expressions of her internal conflict. In as much as they betrayed the recognition of a people's limitations, they had acknowledged the possibilities of other cultures, such as that of Latin America. Samuel Ramos had spoken of the extraordinary cultural upheaval which had grown out of the Revolution in an effort to reveal Mexican values: "It was a political movement which, little by little, extended to Mexican culture through the poetry of Ramón López Velarde, the painting of Diego Rivera and the novel of Mariano Azuela." In the field of education, José Vasconcelos called for the development of "a Mexican culture." "Meanwhile it seemed that philosophy had no place in such a nationalistic movement because it had traditionally tried to assume a more universally human point of view, refusing to be limited by concrete determinations of time and space." But, as we have seen, in Europe the consideration of the historical nature and, thus, the relative limitations of any school of thought was already emerging as a basic philosophical premise. Every philosophy was, somehow, the search for solutions to problems inherent in a particular set of circumstances. In this way, European philosophical vitalism and perspectivism offered a means of justification for Latin Americans' concern. There could be an American philosophy just as there was a Greek, an English, a French and a German philosophy. Ortega y Gasset, according to Ramos, "had come to solve the problem by underlining, in *The Modern Theme*, the historical nature of philosophy. In the combination of these ideas and others, developed in *Meditations on the Quijote*, the revolutionary generation of Mexicans found etymological support for a national philosophy."¹⁶

We remember that Arturo Ardao, too, had stressed the importance of contemporary European thought as assistance in originating a Latin American philosophy. Historicism has been directly or indirectly responsible for a vast movement in this field. The history of philosophy in America takes on fundamental importance to us as Americans. To say that nations approach the universal in different ways does not negate the existence of a world philosophy.

Every people, every nation, every generation has made its contribution. Latin American thought can and must do the same if it is to be authentic. "Historicism, in essence, acclaims the originality, the individuality, the irreducible nature of the spirit in relationship to circumstances imposed by time and space. In this respect, America comes to think of herself as a philosophical object.

Throughout her history, Latin America has tended to mirror intellectual trends from abroad, to adopt and follow them in some way. But when European thought, of its own accord, leads to historicism, the conscience of America, reflecting this, paradoxically comes face to face with itself; what was reflection becomes auto-reflection.¹⁷

The Mexican, Emilio Uranga (1921–), had discovered the impact of one specific contemporary movement on the development of Spanish American thought when he wrote:

We have not taken up the study of existentialism just to be in style. Our motive has been to arrive at a definition of Mexican man. What finally gives value to existentialism is its capacity to establish a basis for the systematic description of human existence—not an existence in the abstract but one situated within the framework of a particular geographical, social and cultural habitat.

European philosophy, now in the form of existentialism, could in fact be the very instrument with which to interpret Mexican reality. "Only when we are to give such a definition," adds Uranga, "will we be justified. Only then we will be able to say that we have understood the universal meaning of that philosophy, having seen it through concrete examples in our own existence." Mexican philosophy? American philosophy? Simply philosophy. "In this way, the Mexican has approached the universal and finds himself at the threshold of an ecumenical style." "To reach this goal," he continues, "Mexico will have to take full advantage of European assistance, recognizing in that other spirit something co-natural and, at the same time, something to be surpassed."¹⁸

Armed with the concepts of historicism, Latin American philosophers set out to clarify a heritage which had grown out of the assimilation of influences in the past. Like it or not, there was a complex of ideas giving meaning to the history traced by their people. Romanticism in the nineteenth century and historicism of our times have offered the adequate methods for reverting to the past in order to delineate a basic, unique spirit.

We see in the relationship which exists between contemporary historicism and the current preoccupation with the authenticity of American philosophy that this preoccupation in itself has led to the study of past philosophies in America. This was the contribution of both Hegel's works in the nineteenth century and historicism in the twentieth.

Today, in the relatively new field of the History of Ideas, Samuel Ramos, José

Gaos and their disciples in Mexico, Ardao and Alberto Zum Felde in Uruguay, Guillermo Francovich in Bolivia, José Luis Romero in Argentina, Cruz Costa in Brazil, Medardo Vitier in Cuba and Augusto Salazar Bondy in Peru have all been motivated by the same interests that were behind the pioneering works of Korn and Ingenieros.

Their aim is not an American philosophy but a philosophy which speaks both for American reality and for mankind in general, one which is neither isolated by its concreteness nor excessively diluted by abstractions. A philosophy with wings, but also of lead, whose claim to universality is its foundation in a particular existence, a given human situation, is sought. Caso described this ideal in the following way:

Neither Sancho nor Quijote; neither binding fetters nor a liberating explosive but rather a strong, constant desire to attain something better, always knowing that true victory is reached on weighted wings. Ideals, like everything else, can be either good or bad. He who limits his horizons is as deplorable as he who widens them so much that the overbearing urgency of those things closest to him dissolve into colorless imprecision.¹⁹

Those who had tried, in one way or another, to penetrate the contents of a philosophy in a particular country or in a particular moment were hoping to assimilate the universal making it apply to concrete circumstances and, in the process, to universalize what was characteristic to those circumstances. "In the future," wrote Ramos, "Mexico should have her own culture. We do not understand by 'a Mexican culture, however,' one which is original and distinct from all others, but the universal made our own. The only way to realize such a conversion is through continued study of European culture."²⁰ "Reality and the ideal," "lead covered wings"—one after another Latin American thinkers have reiterated, continuing in their determination to find a philosophy with application to both the abstract and the concrete.

"I sincerely believe," wrote the Bolivian, Guillermo Francovich (1901–), "that instead of looking for the motive behind our spiritual confinement in our racial and cultural heritage; instead of enclosing ourselves within the realm of nationalism, we should, like our contemporaries, try to assume a more universal view." As to the role of different nations as participants in a universal culture:

All people of the world will refine their way of life so as to contribute the essence of their originality, their own vision of life, and, by doing so, to give more perfect form to that particular human expression which they represent. To drown what so many call the monotonous dirge of human culture today, there will be a kind of grandiose spiritual orchestration to which every nation lends its notes. . . . Differences, instead of separating men, will solidify them in universal harmony.²¹

The universal will broaden the national, the national will be a starting place for the universal. As Graça Aranha, put it: "Being a Brazilian is being everything at once." "European culture should not serve only to prolong the 'European,' nor should it be a model for imitation. It should be employed as a tool with which to create new things, working upon elements from the land and from the native character of the people."²² The Chilean, Felix Schwartzman (1913–), maintained: "The true universality of men's ideas is not in opposition to the necessary linking of the individual with the life-giving elemental sources of his native land." Diego Domínguez Caballero of Panama (1915–), like so many other Latin American thinkers, considered it imperative to begin with the knowledge of one's self and of one's immediate reality in order to move toward a broader authenticity: "Once we know ourselves," he wrote, "we will be able to contribute to the great project of world-wide unification."²³

Familiarity with their own history, analysis of the ideas which explained their people's actions in the past, description of the character of those who made this history—these had been premises for the type of philosophy practiced in Latin America for more than a century. These premises point to increasing relevance in the face of post-war crises and the growing need for Americans to express themselves, to participate on the same level with other peoples of the world in what they know to be a common task. In their endeavor, already rich in rewards, Latin American intellectual leaders made use of theoretical and systematic instruments supplied by European thought: Ramos' adoption of psychoanalysis to define the Mexican; the new focus given to existentialism by Mayz Vallenilla in his studies of American culture; the works of Francovich in which he turned to Spengler and Toynbee to find defense for the possibilities of the Incan world in the universal scheme; the search undertaken by Miró Quesada to find ideological sources behind Latin America's historical progress and support the claim directed to Europeans by humanist, Alfonso Reyes: "We have reached the age of maturity and very soon you will get used to dealing with us. We play an integral and necessary part in humanity. He who does not recognize us is only half a man."²⁴ Concrete reality, as a point of departure toward the universal, provided the necessary weight on the wings of philosophy. At last European thought had been understood, its seemingly inaccessible secret revealed. By showing its own limitations, it pointed to the possibilities of philosophy in America. Jean Paul Sartre described this situation when he said:

It was so natural to be French. It was the simplest, the most economical way to feel universal. It was up to others to explain for what reason, through what fault of theirs, they were not complete men. We are still French, but it no longer seems so natural. There has been an accident which made us understand that our existence was contingent.²⁵

They were only men among men. It is precisely through this limitation, this accident which reveals the human condition, that Latin Americans have been able to overlook their shortcomings and discover their oneness with humanity. Alone and limited, they are united with others. In the words of the poet and philosopher, Octavio Paz: "Like all men, we are finally alone. Nakedness and helplessness await us all. But out there, in open solitude, there is also transcendence: the hands of others who are lonely. For the first time in our history, we are contemporaries of all men."²⁶

Man with Latin American expressions, with his national character, was part of a larger whole. One and the same person, in different but equally inevitable situations, had expressed himself in earlier philosophies and would continue to express himself in the future. Because of their similarities, even in spite of their diversities, concrete human experiences could be understood by all men, and, thus, elevated to a universal plane. Behind the circumstantial, there was always man. When this man was faced with other men, the particular no longer seemed a barrier.

Through philosophy, Europe had given the world her experiences. Now, without inhibitions, without feelings of inferiority, Latin America could do the same. No matter how personal these experiences, they were human and within the reach and comprehension of men everywhere; men who, like their intellectual expressions, were both unique and common. A Latin American philosophy? No. Simply philosophy, the traces of whose origin would be undeniable. This is the conclusion Latin American thought must give to the inquiry into its own existence.

NOTES

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