

Latin American Philosophy: Some Vices

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“We are invisible”: this melancholic assertion alludes to the “non-place” that we occupy as Latin American philosophers or, in general, as philosophers in the Spanish or Portuguese languages. We tend to survive as mere ghosts teaching courses and writing texts, perhaps some memorable ones, which, however, seldom spark anybody’s interest, among other reasons, because almost no one takes the time to read them. In saying this, I do not mean to call upon a useless pathos, nor do I mean to complain, or thrust forth a challenge. I am simply confirming a fact, and a widely acknowledged one at that.

I wish to inquire a little into this invisibility. Later I will look into how the experience of our much acclaimed essay may help in fighting it.

I

The invisibility of philosophers whose means of expression is Spanish or Portuguese is twofold. In the first place, there is an immediate invisibility: we are invisible before our colleagues¹ and even before our very students. In the most influential traditions of philosophy, those expressed in the French and German languages, and in recent years, above all and overwhelmingly, in English, a philosophical book has the group of scholars in that discipline as its main audience, who oftentimes await that particular publication. In Latin America and, more generally, among speakers of Spanish and Portuguese, we care very little about what is believed, wished, and argued by those who also speak our tongues. Rarely is a book published in our languages discussed seriously. It is even rarer to consider it necessary to make it known, involve students in its exploration, and least of all—what a commotion this would cause!—to consider organizing a seminar around what those nearest to us think. We rarely cite—though we may be their friends—those authors whom we have read and admire. Agreed, sometimes a colorful compliment is paid, out of pure obligation, but we generally refuse to

advance any serious, minute, or fruitful criticisms.² (Why get peeved with a colleague who in the future may become powerful, if one can continue interacting in comfortable, sepulchral silence? Besides, though it may sound strange, some prefer this state of affairs. At least if anybody around them argues against them, they turn a deaf ear or take offense, and even plan, not as philosophers, a brilliant counter-argument, but as mobsters, a direct vendetta. As if criticism, especially that which is strong and resilient, were not the highest form of recognition owed to a thinker. Thus, among us, it would seem that we write in order to beautify a curriculum and uphold a more or less public presence, or perhaps to mitigate an afternoon's boredom, and not to try to understand each other better and to better understand the world.)

I have stated that this invisibility is twofold. Why? Recently, the suggestive phrase "conversation of humanity" has become fashionable: it pertains to a conversation among different disciplines, a conversation among different cultures, a conversation among the many individuals of this disheveled planet. Latin American philosophy, and more generally, philosophy written in Spanish or Portuguese, does not play even an indirect role in these conversations. Rarely does a politician, administrator, physicist, chemist, biologist, linguist, sociologist, historian, novelist, poet, painter, musician consider debating with a thinker in these languages, though they may well live next door.³ On even rarer occasions is our work taken into consideration outside the boundaries of our own language, and when, strangely enough, it is done, of course what we could call a "philosophy with local flavor" is favored⁴: that mixture of self-indulgence, statements of purpose, and impressionistic sociology or psychology (one knows: "the being of the Bolivian who is about to wake up and . . .," "the destiny of the deep Peru that strives to find itself despite shady attempts to . . ." or rubbish such as this). Of course nobody thinks of conducting any rigorous discussions with a philosopher of "local flavor." He is only given some award in order to appease a bad colonial conscience, and on to something else.

So, we neither talk to our current or future colleagues, nor, much less, does our voice have a place within the much publicized—although highly selective—conversations of humanity. I insist: the invisibility of those of us who think in Spanish or Portuguese is immediately, as well as mediately, almost perfect. Why?

There are many and very different causes. Some are external—of a social, economic, and political character—others internal: bad intellectual habits. And although, as in most cases, both types of causes are multiply interrelated,⁵ I will only and hastily deal with the internal causes: with three great vices of our arrogant reason, results of colonial heredity.⁶

We may call the first vice "subaltern fervor." A current of thought impresses youth and is then carried on for the rest of one's life in vain repetition of its formulas. In this way, implicitly and, sometimes even explicitly, it is considered that the Headquarters of Thought are elsewhere; thus, succumbing to the

power of simplification, we reduce reflection to the diligent administration of those headquarters in our own locality. For example, if the tradition is of French origin, in the 1940s we were vitalists and followers of Bergson, in the 1950s we became impassioned existentialists, devotees of Sartre and the *Rive Gauche*, in the 1960s we practiced the science fiction of structuralism, including Althusser's delirious, Marxist structuralism, just to convert after the 1970s to hermeneutics, postmodernism, deconstruction, and, above all, to the vertigo of the sublime regarding the Other.

The second vice is the "craving for novelty." One may object: what's wrong with being curious? No doubt, curiosity is a desire to know, it is the incentive and even a first step of every knowledge process. The trouble begins when the curious individual becomes addicted and aimless. For when curiosity becomes a craving for novelty, one is no longer concerned with knowing something in order to think for oneself regarding that issue, but to be "up to date," "keeping up with current events." Note that the concept of wanting to know and the concept of wanting to be up to date refer to two opposite attitudes: in the first case there is active, exploring, deep, learning; in the second, passive, superficial receiving that merely seeks information on what transpires in other landscapes. Furthermore, the concept of knowing is regulated by validity criteria such as having true, justified beliefs; the concept of being up to date only admits patterns that appeal to systems with social currency.

Apparently, the craving for novelty and its reigning attitude of seeking to be up to date originates as a reaction to the predominance of a particular, bankrupt international Headquarters of Thought. In reality, the craving for novelty constitutes the predictable complement of subaltern fervor. This may be observed in many Latin American countries. As a clear example we have Argentina and Mexico during the 1950s, where a combination of the rhetorical gestures of Ortega, subsidiaries of Heidegger and, above all, of Sartre's views regarding authenticity—which made us anguish over, oh!, literally, any sort of Nothing—carried a double craving for novelty as a response: the haziest and most convoluted ones latched on to the School of Frankfurt; the more sober ones turned into analytic philosophers. In this way, by the end of the 1950s we began to learn modern logic, embraced Carnap's positivism and/or Popper's falsificationism, or we staunchly fought for ordinary language philosophy, which was then fashionable at Oxford. A few years later, by the end of the 1960s, we were told that Quine and, later, Donald Davidson had overcome those militant oppositions that so divided us and we "caught up," becoming disciplined Quineans or passionately exercising Davidsonian radical interpretation. That's where we were at the start of the 1990s when, all of a sudden, we were pulled by tremendous opposing forces: on the one hand, Kripke's neo-essentialism, on the other, cognitive science, and even a third, Brandom's and Rorty's neo-pragmatism.

Against these two vices, we in Latin America are constantly being called to liberate ourselves: to stop looking outside so much, toward the shining Headquarters of Thought, to start appreciating who we are and what surrounds us. We

must decolonialize, though it may be difficult and painful. Of course, we must decolonialize. Unfortunately, though, this sensible invitation soon degenerates into another vice: into that arrogance of collective identities that conform to “nationalist enthusiasms” and their consequence, a monstrous idea, “national philosophies.” Who would have thought that the worn-out rhetoric of authenticity would somehow seep through the homogenous selves, be they individual or collective. In Latin America we know all too well the latest effects of these carnivals, for example, in formulating questions such as: why rethink Aristotle and Frege when we have romantic ballads that call for eternal love? The best thing to do—it is advised—is to return to what is ours: to sentimentality or terror, to moved weeping or shot-guns, as if it were possible or truly desirable to live against all education, ignoring science, and beating women.

A fatal threading of intellectual habits is here before us. It is formed by these three vices, so characteristic of Latin American philosophy⁷ and, to a certain extent, although in many different versions, of all philosophy in Spanish or Portuguese: subaltern fervor, craving for novelty, nationalist enthusiasm. If I am not mistaken, the presence of these three vices partly explains our invisibility. And partly also justifies it.

Nevertheless, in order for the diagnosis not to turn into self-complacency, a therapy should be evaluated; for example, how could the writing of our essays help fight these vices, which so belong to arrogant reason?

II

Above all, let us avoid any simplifying vertigo that would reduce philosophical writing to the essay form. That is, let us avoid statements such as: the tradition to which we belong, that of counter-reform, is not sympathetic to arduous rational investigation, nor have we inherited the tools required to deal with the most centrally technical problems of philosophy. Besides, in Latin America, surrounded as we are by intolerable poverty, it is shameful to “waste one’s time” with the traditional perplexities, for example, stopping to ask one’s self: what proof do we have of the existence of the external world? Or maybe: how are words related to things? Or even: are there universal rights beyond particular cultures? One may be more categorical yet and declare: as in many other matters, our trembling republics also arrive late to the great projects of philosophy. These postmodern times advance at an overwhelming pace: we skim through the newspaper diagonally or receive the multiple news flashes on TV during the half-awake state of a nap. In the best case scenario, people that matter can still read zealous essays of seven or eight pages that state whether one is for or against the legalization of abortion, or drugs, or the cloning of anything. However, thinking, and by this I mean reflecting on one’s own, over three hundred tightly written pages, the detailed reasons given in favor or against a premise in an argument and its possible options, and of the

arguments that it implies or are opposed to that premise, that is something of the past, or of a youthful limbo-state; meanwhile one chooses something serious to do with one's life.

I can hardly resist the temptation to break down these manipulative, paternalist excuses: that those of us who speak Spanish or Portuguese are only capable of writing popular essays—short and light; that in order to do great philosophy we lack tradition and timing and, in Latin America, besides, or above all, we lack bread. Quickly I respond that, clearly, tradition and timing are created creating them and, regarding bread . . . , I recall when it was advised to choose between bread and freedom: those supposed well-grounded individuals who chose bread, after much blood discovered that they had lost freedom . . . and bread. Agreed: one must look at these jagged excuses with more detachment in order to advise those of us who speak Spanish or Portuguese against thinking on our own. Nevertheless, I insist: I am more interested in attending to the possible therapies.

But before we do this, oh! . . . another difficulty. It will most certainly, alarmingly be claimed that with these protests we have embraced the overflowing paradox: we do not accept riding on a third-class car declaring ourselves competent only for light philosophy, and in so doing, we resist succumbing to the simplifying vertigo that reduces philosophical writing to the essay form. However, at the same time, we greatly value our essay and wish to learn much from it, but, how?

It may not be completely useless to try to characterize, at least grossly, what we mean by “our essay.” Above all I am appealing to the Latin American essay: to that vast and complex set of traditions, generally originating in literature and, sometimes, journalism, that includes both moral, political, and social militancy, as well as poetic or anthropological discourse. I call upon three or four outstanding names: from Marti or Ruben Dario, to Borges, Lezama Lima, Octavio Paz, or Vargas Llosa. (But not only them. I suspect that the most characteristic properties of this type of essay may also be attributed to the immensely fertile tradition of the Spanish essay, a tradition that, by the way, receives more feedback from philosophy and that spans, for example, over many of Ortega's writings to certain areas of Maria Zambrano and, also, of Fernando Savater and Victoria Camps, although it also covers, among so many other texts, let's say, some of the writings of Clarin, Sanchez Ferlosio, Javier Marias. . . .) However, can we find in this complex and changing work of poets, novelists, and philosophers some common properties that could allow us to speak of an essay tradition?

Not without hesitation I chance to propose the following list of properties:

- a) *Freshness condition*: all our good essays try to focus on the problem under discussion from an angle seldom, if ever, adopted. Hence, more than continuity with previous explorations of the same subject, a break, or even radiant surprise is sought.

- b) *Particularity condition*: regardless of the problem under discussion, specific well-traced examples—e.g, a political revolution, a mood, a scientific discovery, a recent novel, or a landscape—are employed as the starting point of reflection.
- c) *Publicity condition*: discourse is in no way specialized, it is not directed at a community of experts in the subject matter. Hence the effort to display an elegant, incisive style that converses with the reader.
- d) *Interpellation condition*: an individual wishes to influence the wishes, beliefs, and/or actions of other individuals. The objective is to convince rather than inform.

Of course, the question is: how can we learn anything from these conditions of our essay in order to fight the vices in our philosophy?

Let's see. Vices such as subaltern fervor and nationalist enthusiasm are in no way friendly toward the freshness condition: these vices require blind faith, be it with the chosen current of thought, be it with the "foundationalist myths" created by the nationalism that is the object of such enthusiasm. However, the craving for novelty does not cultivate this condition either, inasmuch as it conforms to a completely receptive attitude: one strives to be "up to date," foolishly one is open to "whatever comes our way" without seeking to have one's own voice heard. This is why all three vices encourage some form of scholasticism. One may randomly check any of our philosophical articles or books; it may be that we find adequate or even very good presentations from philosophers, more from the past than the present, but no original debates surrounding the problem occupying those masters. In this way, the more or less scholarly, more or less critical presentation of certain authors or theories does not nurture the discussion around this problem, but tends to substitute it. In this sense one must emphasize: the history of philosophy is truly fruitful only when it is an argumentative history of philosophy,⁸ when it is carried out from the vantage point of today's discussions, not when it becomes a mere antiquarians' pastime.

Furthermore, these bad habits are not exclusive to any particular issue: they run from metaphysical problems such as "what is there?" to more punctual political difficulties. For instance, after the fall of the Marxist paradigm investigations regarding democracy have multiplied. But it's a shame that these studies are usually limited to comparisons of, for example, the opinions of Rawls, Habermas, and Dworkin to this effect, without the author even thinking of introducing new arguments upon these in order to deal with the problems in our trembling Latin American democracies. This is why another way of formulating the freshness condition would be to demand: to the problems, to the problems themselves!

The second condition, that of particularity, calls for meticulous and concentrated work regarding the specific problem being explored. In this way, contact with concrete problems directly feeds the discussions that organize it thematically. Against these processes of continuous feedback, in different ways, the three

mentioned vices cut all ties with concrete problems. Some may argue: how can the particularity condition be applied, when philosophy is the most abstract, most general form of reflection? Is it not true that philosophy is concerned, to quote Hegel, with “the work of the concept”? But beware: let us not confuse abstract reflection and conceptual work with a flair for oratory and the forceful juxtaposition of vague things. For example, in Latin American philosophy we run into a lot of talk regarding the decline of the enlightened project without studying a single concrete case. Even when there is reflection on topics that lend themselves to well-limited, precise discussion, a fear of real substance prevails. There are entire books on philosophy of science that discuss the theories of Popper, Kuhn, Feyerabend, or whomever the fashionable author of the time is, but regarding which, as pages are turned, the reader starts to get an uneasy feeling that the author of the book knows very little about the sciences dealt with by the thinkers he is presenting and merely allows them to converse among themselves. This is why the condition of particularity could also be reformulated demanding: to the problems, to the problems themselves!

Can our philosophy learn anything from the condition of publicity? In essays, this condition—which often operates as a demand for style—has, among others, the task of prohibiting the use of specialized language. This prohibition cannot be carried out without further justification to the writing of philosophical texts, for the reconstruction of many problems requires specialized tools; for instance, in certain areas of knowledge it is necessary to employ logical language or probability calculus. Nevertheless, whichever the technique being employed, one must make sure that the language in use does not depend on any of the described vices. Once more, then, this condition may be restated through the invitation: to the problems, to the problems themselves!

What happens with our three vices in relation to the fourth condition: interpellation? We are so busy installing a subaltern or keeping “up to date” that we often forget to ask ourselves if we are authorized to defend certain arguments, and to what those arguments commit us. Hence we frequently eliminate the undeniable motivation of all philosophizing: that our arguments may convince. Nationalist enthusiasm seems to satisfy this condition, but only in appearance. Actually, it also betrays it: there is such an obsession with authenticity, with fidelity to roots or liberation, that we are incapable of stopping to give a step-by-step presentation of the arguments that justify our normative proposals. In this way, interpellation becomes all-inclusive and too general and, for this reason, empty. Let’s call again upon the trend of speaking like the Other, with an emphatic capital “O.” Among us, that trend hinders the examination of a multitude of others that surround us, and of the specific conditions that afflict them. How many moral or political philosophers have discussed in Latin America, with rigor and empirical knowledge, corruption, terror, or poverty, in a continent where more than fifty percent of the population is sunk in it? In this respect nothing is achieved by raising one’s voice, rhetorically opening one’s arms and ripping one’s garments.⁹

Again, it seems unavoidable to restate the condition of interpellation by asking: to the problems, to the problems themselves!

III

I go back to the beginning: have I defended that if we elaborate and then solve or dissolve with depth and rigor the “problems themselves” or, better yet, a few of them, our double invisibility will disappear? In regards to this question, two observations must be urgently made.

We must beware of not restricting in a colonial fashion what is understood by “the problems themselves.” As a matter of fact, when I speak of “the problems themselves,” I refer to any of the problems that have been discussed within that memory that is the argumentative history of philosophy, or that are being discussed today, or that may rise in the course of our most diverse reflections, or that, all of a sudden, are given to us by the realities that surround us. I thus oppose any simplifying vertigo of the philosophical agenda in Latin America or, in general, in Spanish or Portuguese, that tries to reduce our concerns to problems that are purely social, or purely political, or purely logical, or purely meta-scientific, or purely aesthetic, or purely. . . . Despite all of this, we, the inhabitants of these poor regions, are also people. Here in the periphery, we are also concerned with truth and happiness, knowledge and friendship, justice and death.¹⁰

As regards the doubt of whether by facing the problems themselves our invisibility will come to an end, a careful response must state: not necessarily. Nevertheless, at least we will eliminate some of the internal causes of this invisibility¹¹: colonial vices such as subaltern fervor, craving for novelty, and national enthusiasm. So, maybe, little by little we will begin to acquire the habit of leafing through articles and books written by our colleagues in our languages—language is also a homeland—and, with time, if fortune smiles upon us, staunch and illuminated debates will rise among us. Because if we don’t begin by listening to each other, who will listen to us?

Notes

1. Certain characteristics are prevalent in the volumes published in the *Enciclopedia iberoamericana de filosofía (Iberoamerican Encyclopaedia of Philosophy)*, Trotta-Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Madrid, since 1990. Let’s begin by noting the great quality and even excellence of most of the contributions. Nevertheless, and unfortunately, very few of them reference others from the same encyclopedia and, except for the first volume, almost all of the referenced bibliography is written in languages that are neither Spanish nor Portuguese; it turns out to be surprising when writers of these languages are occasionally cited. It is impossible to even imagine that the last two features could be present in an encyclopaedia written in English, French, or German. Cf. Hurtado (1996). Likewise, anybody attending any of the many philosophical conventions constantly being held in Spanish or Portuguese speaking countries, or consulting the numerous periodicals specializing in philosophy published in these languages, will systematically encounter these last two characteristics.

2. It may be that we have not given enough recognition to the ambiguous role played since 1940 by the construction of an academic discipline such as the one called “History of Ideas in America” or “History of Latin American Thought,” a field inspired by the teachings of Jose Gaos in Mexico and Francisco Romero in Buenos Aires. I judge the role of this discipline as “ambiguous,” because it is one thing to trace the history and explain certain ideas in a contextual manner—taking into account social, political, or economic factors, among others—and it is another, very different one to employ them in discussing their comprehension, truth, or relevance. In other words: one should not confuse the historical—or, some would say “external”—value of certain thoughts with their philosophical—or “internal”—value (of course, neither Gaos nor Romero made this mistake). Regarding the history of ideas in Latin America and its periodization, consult Leopoldo Zea’s classic book, *El pensamiento latinoamericano (Latin American Thought)* (1976a). There is also a useful presentation in Ardao (1979).

3. For example, Bozal (1996). It is unfortunately symptomatic that a book of this nature, written in our tongue by authors who speak our tongue, excludes aesthetic and artistic thought expressed in the diverse intonations of the Spanish language (with the exception of Ortega). Lezama Lima, Borges, or Octavio Paz—just to mention a few well-known Latin American names—have reflected about art in a more profound and decisive way than many of the featured Anglo-Saxon, French, or German authors (many of which are second or third-rate writers). Cf. my review of Bozal’s book, so valuable in other ways (Pereda 1997).

4. In many recent reference works written in English—for example, the *Dictionary of Philosophy* from Simon Blackburn—philosophy in Latin America simply does not exist: an article about Latin America simply was not included. In the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* from 1998, which consists of nine thick volumes and contains 2,054 articles, the view on philosophy in Latin America is presided by three criteria: first of all, no attention is paid to any of the individuals that really matter in Latin American philosophy. Hence, there are no articles on Latin American philosophers whose inclusion could be expected by the reader; for example, concerning Mexico there are no entries for Antonio Caso or Jose Vasconcelos, nor for Leopoldo Zea or Luis Villoro (of course this encyclopedia is replete with entries for Anglo-Saxon, German, and French philosophers, but also for philosophers from China, Arabia, Russia, Italy, Poland. . .); no mention is made even of the work of Mario Bunge or Hector Neri Castañeda. In second place, what feminists have rightfully called a “double standard” morality is practiced, which, when applied to a culture is, I believe, a form of racism: while the serious, important, long articles in the encyclopedia are written by analytic philosophers—implying thereby that this is the “serious” or “important” type of philosophy—the articles on Latin America favor ideologization. In third place, regardless of the chosen perspective, contributions are full of factual mistakes and the selection of names is entirely capricious. For example, the article “Phenomenology in Latin America,” in the section dedicated to Mexico, includes two completely unknown names, even for historians of ideas in Mexico: Carmen Hernández de Ragoña and Arturo Rivas Sáinz. What would we think of an article on philosophy in the United States during the twentieth century that did not include names such as Pierce, Dewey, Quine, and Davidson? In this regard, cf. Hurtado (1999).

5. It is very important not to lose sight of these interrelations. On the other hand, what I mean by “internal causes,” by a pathology in our intellectual habits, are not exclusively philosophical ailments. To this effect, it is worthwhile to remember Carlos Thiebaut’s criticism of philosophies of malaise such as the School of Frankfurt: “The philosophy of malaise, as every other form of narcissism, confuses with itself the objects it deals with: it attributes to itself the sense, but also the guilt, of the world . . . as if the disaster of that world were due to a philosophical disease, that of instrumental reason.” See Thiebaut (1999, 36).

6. I have already alluded to these vices in other works, whether specifically in relation with philosophy (1983, 135) or in relation with academic culture in general in Latin America (1999). Regarding this same point, see Rabossi (1994).

7. We can formulate these vices alternatively by grouping the first two—subaltern fervor and craving for novelty—as “universalist vices” and the third—nationalist enthusiasm—as a “vice of the contextualists, or particularists, or Latinamericanists.” As soon as we consult any monographic

study on philosophy in any Latin American country, we encounter, once again, the presence of these oppositions. For example, David Sobrevilla notes that one of the characteristics of current Peruvian philosophy is “the opposition between universalist philosophy and regionalist/Latinamerican/Incan or Andean philosophy” (1996, 29). Sobrevilla describes the vices of universalism as “turning one’s back on one’s reality and turning instead toward an extraneous reality, of cultivating in this case a philosophy that does not take into account one’s own reality and the tradition of Latin American philosophy” (29) and the “vices of the particularists” as the project of “a regionalist philosophy that ignores the universalist characteristics of philosophy and is offered as a continuation of a presumed Inca or Andean philosophy, and which is in complete opposition to western thought” (29). As will be seen in note 10, this false opposition is old and persistent. Maybe one of the most recent—and commented upon—illustrations of this opposition may be found in the double causeways adopted by the Mexican students of José Gaos. On the one hand, Gaos, the thorough scholar of Husserl’s logical investigations, has as his students those who introduced analytic philosophy in Mexico: Alejandro Rossi, Fernando Salmerón, and Luis Villoro. On the other, from Gaos, the teacher of Ortega and his “I am (myself and my circumstance) and if I do not save it, I do not save myself,” sprung Leopoldo Zea and his double enterprise: the project of tracing a history of ideas in Latin America beginning with his admired work *El positivismo en México. Nacimiento, apogeo y decadencia (Positivism in Mexico. Birth, Flourishing, and Decline)* (1968) and the program of a Latin American philosophy that includes Zea (1953, 1976b, 1976c, and 1978), among others. Beware: by this observation I am not suggesting that the first group of philosophers were oblivious of the social and political situation surrounding them, nor that Zea was ever, philosophically speaking, a particularist or a contextualist philosopher (Cf. Pereda 1996). Nothing would be more wrong than drawing these conclusions. In this regard, it is not useless to remember the attempt to do justice to both types of concerns in the well-balanced works of Francisco Miro Quesada; see Quesada (1974, 1976).

8. See Pereda (2005).

9. Among the attempts to do something like “naturalizing” philosophy of liberation, thereby reflecting upon the basis of the contributions made by the social sciences, we may count Dussel (1998).

10. I agree with Alejandro Rossi when he states: “philosophy is an ‘unbridled’ discipline, I mean, it lacks clear boundaries. Sometimes it is a reflection on science and sometimes it is and analysis of the concept of friendship. Sometimes it is the intervention of a supposed proof of the existence of God and others it is the obsessive attempt to prove that the table in front of me is in fact there. Philosophy’s glory is, precisely, that it has no theme, that it delves into anything” (1998, 199–200). Outside of the persistence of certain colonial habits, I do not understand why some Latin Americans want to stop the rest from acquiring this wise “unbridled” character: from “delving into everything.” This simplifying force has a long history among us, one of whose origins may be found in the claims of Juan Bautista Alberdi. In the daily paper *El Nacional de Montevideo*, on October 2, 1840, Alberdi published his ever famous *Ideas* to preside over the confection of the course on contemporary philosophy. The original text was published again in Ardao (1945, 163–76). I quote some paragraphs from these *Ideas* in order to illustrate: “We will broach, then, on our way, the metaphysics of the individual in order to study the metaphysics of the people.” “We will evidently study philosophy: but in order that this study, usually so sterile, gives us a positive advantage. . . (This is why we will study) philosophy applied to objects of a more immediate interest to us.” Later Alberdi introduces a proposal that, in my opinion, dishonors us: “If it may be said, America practices what Europe thinks,” as if in these regions we could only “apply” what others think. One of the best known passages of the *Ideas*, which can be read as a brief statement of his basic thesis—and of the basic thesis of much of nationalistic enthusiasm—is the following: “American philosophy must be essentially political and social in its objective, ardent and prophetic in its instincts, synthetic and organic in its method, positive and realistic in its procedures, republican in its spirit and destinations.” In this sense, many proponents of the Latin American philosophy of liberation may be considered disciples of Alberdi. As well as any philosopher defending the view that in Latin America it is only legitimate to make practical philosophy. For instance, from the phenomenology and ethics in the writings of Habermas, Guillermo Hoyos, in

his work entitled “Filosofía latinoamericana significa uso ético de la razón práctica” (1998), seems to give reasons in support of this view (although he argues in a more [mitigated] form than suggested in the alarming title). Javier Sasso, in his book *La filosofía latinoamericana y las construcciones de su historia (Latin-American Philosophy and the Constructions of its History)* (1998), after very subtle commentaries on the texts and contexts of Alberdi’s thought, opposes it to the contemporary project of Andres Bello contained in his *Memorias (Memories)* regarding the courses in public education in 1849. See Bello (1982). Bello proposes a theory of argumentation as prior to any kind of learning: “Nothing seems to me more advantageous for a young intelligence than letting it span, distinguish, and appreciate the different procedures than, in a written or verbal discussion, are put before us as conducive to a conclusion that is true or claims to be so” (173). This alternative project for Latin American philosophy finds an indispensable author in Carlos Vaz Ferreira and his *Lógica viva (Living Logic)*; see his *Obras completas* (1963). Beware: I don’t see why we must consider both projects as mutually exclusive. For example, Luis Villoro contributes no less to Latin-American thought when he writes his rigorous theory of (1982), than when he publishes his pioneer writings (1950, 1986) or his recent, brilliant works (1997, 1998).

11. Besides, we will have a better time. Let’s be honest: as a result of these three vices, in addition to invisibility, exasperation is sometimes unavoidable and so, the rest of the time, is boredom.

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