

LATIN AMERICAN PHILOSOPHY

FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

The Human Condition,
Values, and the
Search for Identity

edited by

JORGE J. E. GRACIA

and

ELIZABETH MILLÁN-ZAIBERT



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59 John Glenn Drive
Amherst, New York 14228-2197

So downright foolish are you all
that your injurious justice claims
to blame one woman's cruelty
and fault the other's laxity.

How then can she be moderate
to whom your suit aspires,
if, ingrate, she makes you displeased,
or, easy, prompts your ire?

Between such ire and such anguish
—the tales your fancy tells—
lucky is she who does not love you;
complain then, as you will!

Your dotting anguish feathers the wings
of liberties that women take,
and once you've caused them to be bad,
you want to find them as good as saints.

But who has carried greater blame
in a passion gone astray:
she who falls to constant pleading,
or he who pleads with her to fall?

Or which more greatly must be faulted,
though either may commit a wrong:
she who sins for need of payment,
or he who pays for his enjoyment?

Why then are you so alarmed
by the fault that is your own?
Wish women to be what you make them,
or make them what you wish they were.

Leave off soliciting her fall
and then indeed, more justified,
that eagerness you might accuse
of the woman who besieges you.

Thus I prove with all my forces
the ways your arrogance does battle:
for in your offers and your demands
we have devil, flesh, and world: a man.

Simón Bolívar (1783–1830)

Simón Bolívar is one of the most important figures in the history of Latin America, both as a thinker and as a man of action. Born in Caracas, Venezuela, in 1783 to a wealthy family, he was orphaned at the young age of nine. Subsequently, he was raised by his maternal grandparents. He received a European education at home by private tutors and was familiar with the liberal and republican ideals of the French Enlightenment. Andrés Bello (1781–1865), one of Venezuela's most important intellectual figures, was Bolívar's tutor.

In 1799, with the death of his grandfather, Bolívar was sent to Spain and France to continue his studies. He returned briefly to Caracas and then, in 1803, traveled to Paris, where the revolutionary zeal of the city influenced him. On August 15, 1805, Bolívar is said to have announced in Rome that he would devote his life to the cause of independence. Before returning to Caracas in June of 1806, Bolívar made a brief visit to the United States, which served to invigorate his revolutionary goals. Napoleon's invasion of Spain in 1808 opened a space for the young revolutionaries of Venezuela, who used the instability of the Spanish Crown to move from ideas of a revolution to the first steps toward its realization. This revolutionary action led to Bolívar's imprisonment in 1808 and marked his official public entry onto the political stage.

In Venezuela, Bolívar worked as a diplomat, a statesman, and then, in his most important role, as a general in the revolutionary army that ultimately defeated the royalist Spanish troops and led to the establishment of the countries known today as Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, and Panama. Because of his pivotal and leading role in the independence movement, Bolívar is known as "*el Libertador*" (the Liberator). Between 1817 and 1826 Bolívar fought tirelessly to free and maintain the

independence of most of South America. He led the Viceroyalties of New Granada (which had Bogotá as its capital and consisted of present-day Colombia, Venezuela, Panama, and Ecuador) and Peru to independence. He then established present-day Bolivia (named after him), by separating Alto Peru from the rest of Peru and proclaiming it a separate territory.

Bolívar is the undisputed hero of the independence movements in Latin America and is respected as a great military genius. In 1819 he became the president of Gran Colombia. His dream was the establishment of a continental union. Yet, this plan never reached fruition and all attempts in the direction of unifying the newly independent regions were futile, leading Bolívar to believe that the project was impossible. As all hope of Pan-Americanism withered, Bolívar himself became disillusioned, claiming that "America is ungovernable. Those who served the revolution plowed the sea." He died in Colombia, of tuberculosis, in 1830.

Jamaica Letter

REPLY OF A SOUTH AMERICAN TO A GENTLEMAN OF THIS ISLAND [JAMAICA]

[Blanco y Aspuruá, V, 331-342]

Kingston, Jamaica, September 6, 1815.

My dear Sir:

I hasten to reply to the letter of the 29th ultimo which you had the honor of sending me and which I received with the greatest satisfaction. Sensible though I am of the interest you desire to take in the fate of my country, and of your commiseration with her for the tortures she has suffered from the time of her discovery until the present at the hands of her destroyers, the Spaniards, I am no less sensible of the obligation which your solicitous inquiries about the principal objects of American policy place upon me. Thus, I find myself in conflict between the desire to reciprocate your confidence, which honors me, and the difficulty of rewarding it, for lack of documents and books and because of my own limited knowledge of a land so vast, so varied, and so little known as the New World.

In my opinion it is impossible to answer the questions that you have so kindly posed. Baron von Humboldt himself, with his encyclopedic theoretical and practical knowledge, could hardly do so properly, because, although some of the facts about America and her development are known, I dare say the better part are shrouded in mystery. Accordingly, only con-

From "Reply of a South American to a Gentleman of This Island [Jamaica]," trans. Lewis Bertrand, published by Banco de Venezuela (New York: Colonial Press, 1951), pp. 103-105, 109-11.

jectures that are more or less approximate can be made, especially with regard to her future and the true plans of the Americans, inasmuch as our continent has within it potentialities for every facet of development and revealed in the history of nations, by reason of its physical characteristics and because of the hazards of war and the uncertainties of politics.

As I feel obligated to give due consideration to your esteemed letter and to the philanthropic intentions prompting it, I am impelled to write you these words, wherein you will certainly not find the brilliant thoughts you seek but rather a candid statement of my ideas.

"Three centuries ago," you say, "began the atrocities committed by the Spaniards on this great hemisphere of Columbus." Our age has rejected these atrocities as mythical, because they appear to be beyond the human capacity for evil. Modern critics would never credit them were it not for the many and frequent documents testifying to these horrible truths. The humane Bishop of Chiapas, that apostle of America, Las Casas, has left to posterity a brief description of these horrors, extracted from the trial records in Sevilla relating to the cases brought against the *conquistadores*, and containing the testimony of every respectable person then in the New World, together with the charges [*procesos*], which the tyrants made against each other. All this is attested by the foremost historians of that time. Every impartial person has admitted the zeal, sincerity, and high character of that friend of humanity, who so fervently and so steadfastly denounced to his government and to his contemporaries the most horrible acts of sanguinary frenzy.

With what a feeling of gratitude I read that passage in your letter in which you say to me: "I hope that the success which then followed Spanish arms may now turn in favor of their adversaries, the badly oppressed people of South America." I take this hope as a prediction, if it is justice that determines man's contests. Success will crown our efforts, because the destiny of America has been irrevocably decided; the tie that bound her to Spain has been severed. Only a concept maintained that tie and kept the parts of that immense monarchy together. That which formerly bound them now divides them. The hatred that the Peninsula has inspired in us is greater than the ocean between us. It would be easier to have the two continents meet than to reconcile the spirits of the two countries. The habit of obedience; a community of interest, of understanding, of religion; mutual goodwill; a tender regard for the birthplace and good name of our forefathers; in short, all that gave rise to our hopes, came to us from Spain. As a result there was born a principle of affinity that seemed eternal, notwithstanding the misbehavior of our rulers which weakened that sympathy, or, rather, that bond enforced by the domination of their rule. At present the contrary attitude persists: we are threatened with the fear of death, dishonor, and every harm; there is nothing we have

not suffered at the hands of that unnatural step-mother—Spain. The veil has been torn asunder. We have already seen the light, and it is not our desire to be thrust back into darkness. The chains have been broken; we have been freed, and now our enemies seek to enslave us anew. For this reason America fights desperately, and seldom has desperation failed to achieve victory.

Because successes have been partial and spasmodic, we must not lose faith. In some regions the Independents triumph, while in others the tyrants have the advantage. What is the end result? Is not the entire New World in motion, armed for defense? We have but to look around us on this hemisphere to witness a simultaneous struggle at every point. . . .

I have listed the population, which is based on more or less exact data, but which a thousand circumstances render deceiving. This inaccuracy cannot easily be remedied, because most of the inhabitants live in rural areas and are often nomadic; they are farmers, herdsmen, and migrants, lost amidst thick giant forests, solitary plains, and isolated by lakes and mighty streams. Who is capable of compiling complete statistics of a land like this? Moreover, the tribute paid by the Indians, the punishments of the slaves, the first fruits of the harvest [*primicias*], tithes [*díezmos*], and taxes levied on farmers, and other impositions have driven the poor Americans from their homes. This is not to mention the war of extermination that has already taken a toll of nearly an eighth part of the population and frightened another large part away. All in all, the difficulties are insuperable, and the tally is likely to show only half the true count.

It is even more difficult to foresee the future fate of the New World, to set down its political principles, or to prophesy what manner of government it will adopt. Every conjecture relative to America's future is, I feel, pure speculation. When mankind was in its infancy, steeped in uncertainty, ignorance, and error, was it possible to foresee what system it would adopt for its preservation? Who could venture to say that a certain nation would be a republic or a monarchy; this nation great, that nation small? To my way of thinking, such is our own situation. We are a young people. We inhabit a world apart, separated by broad seas. We are young in the ways of almost all the arts and sciences, although, in a certain manner, we are old in the ways of civilized society. I look upon the present state of America as similar to that of Rome after its fall. Each part of Rome adopted a political system conforming to its interest and situation or was led by the individual ambitions of certain chiefs, dynasties, or associations. But this important difference exists: those dispersed parts later reestablished their ancient nations, subject to the changes imposed by circumstances or events. But we scarcely retain a vestige of what once was; we are, moreover, neither Indian nor European, but a species midway between the legitimate proprietors of this country and the Spanish

usurpers. In short, though Americans by birth we derive our rights from Europe, and we have to assert these rights against the rights of the natives, and at the same time we must defend ourselves against the invaders. This places us in a most extraordinary and involved situation. Notwithstanding that it is a type of divination to predict the result of the political course which America is pursuing, I shall venture some conjectures which, of course, are colored by my enthusiasm and dictated by rational desires rather than by reasoned calculations.

The role of the inhabitants of the American hemisphere has for centuries been purely passive. Politically they were nonexistent. We are still in a position lower than slavery, and therefore it is more difficult for us to rise to the enjoyment of freedom. Permit me these transgressions in order to establish the issue. States are slaves because of either the nature or the misuse of their constitutions; a people is therefore enslaved when the government, by its nature or its vices, infringes on and usurps the rights of the citizen or subject. Applying these principles, we find that America was denied not only its freedom but even an active and effective tyranny. Let me explain. Under absolutism there are no recognized limits to the exercise of governmental powers. The will of the great sultan, khan, bey, and other despotic rulers is the supreme law, carried out more or less arbitrarily by the lesser pashas, khans, and satraps of Turkey and Persia, who have an organized system of oppression in which inferiors participate according to the authority vested in them. To them is entrusted the administration of civil, military, political, religious, and tax matters. But, after all is said and done, the rulers of Ispahan are Persians; the viziers of the Grand Turk are Turks; and the sultans of Tartary are Tartars. China does not bring its military leaders and scholars from the land of Genghis Khan, her conqueror, notwithstanding that the Chinese of today are the lineal descendants of those who were reduced to subjection by the ancestors of the present-day Tartars.

How different is our situation! We have been harassed by a conduct which has not only deprived us of our rights but has kept us in a sort of permanent infancy with regard to public affairs. If we could at least have managed our domestic affairs and our internal administration, we could have acquainted ourselves with the processes and mechanics of public affairs. We should also have enjoyed a personal consideration, thereby commanding a certain unconscious respect from the people, which is so necessary to preserve amidst revolutions. That is why I say we have even been deprived of an active tyranny, since we have not been permitted to exercise its functions.

Address Delivered at the Inauguration of the Second National Congress of Venezuela at Angostura

Angostura, February 15, 1819.

Gentlemen:

Fortunate is the citizen, who, under the emblem of his command, has convoked this assembly of the national sovereignty so that it may exercise its absolute will! I, therefore, place myself among those most favored by Divine Providence, for I have had the honor of uniting the representatives of the people of Venezuela in this august Congress, the source of legitimate authority, the custodian of the sovereign will, and the arbiter of the Nation's destiny.

In returning to the representatives of the people the Supreme Power which was entrusted to me, I gratify not only my own innermost desires but also those of my fellow-citizens and of future generations, who trust to your wisdom, rectitude, and prudence in all things. Upon the fulfillment of this grateful obligation, I shall be released from the immense authority with which I have been burdened and from the unlimited responsibility which has weighed so heavily upon my slender resources. Only the force of necessity, coupled with the imperious will of the people, compelled me to assume the fearful and dangerous post of *Dictator and Supreme Chief of the Republic*. But now I can breathe more freely, for I am returning to you this authority which I have succeeded in maintaining at the price of so much danger, hardship, and suffering, amidst the worst tribulations suffered by any society.

From "Address Delivered at the Inauguration of the Second National Congress of Venezuela at Angostura," trans. Lewis Bertrand, Banco de Venezuela (New York: Colonial Press, 1951), pp. 173-77, 182-83, 191-92.