

ENCUENTROS



*The Essential Role of Ethics
in the Development of Latin America*

Lecture by

Salomón Lerner

Convictions That Sabotage Progress

Lecture by

Marcos Aguinis

The Difficulty of Telling the Truth

Lecture by

Darío Ruiz Gómez

IDB CULTURAL CENTER

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THE ESSENTIAL ROLE OF ETHICS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF LATIN AMERICA

Salomón Lerner

The reason for these modest reflections today constitutes a crucial subject for Latin American countries, namely: the role that ethics is called to play in the ever postponed expectations for development of Latin America and the Caribbean.

The urgency to incorporate an ethical perspective into development theories and policies is not entirely new, nor is it a marginal issue in contemporary discussion. Indeed, problems related to moral values and attitudes are being ever more forcefully incorporated into a holistic approach to this subject. That is due largely—I want to emphasize—to the efforts of thinkers and scholars identified with this idea of ethics and development, such as Bernardo Kliksberg of the IDB.

In this lecture, I propose to discuss the relationship between ethics and development – from a vantage point marked by the philosophical disciplines of which I am a proponent, and by the instructive experience of having observed firsthand the rav-

ages of violence in one society—my own country, Peru—and with due consideration of the unsettling questions that the issue poses for development in our region.

Here I will argue that ethics must be granted a substantive place in the way development is understood. While the issue of ethics in recent years has indeed been incorporated into the discussion on the progress of the region, that incorporation has consisted primarily as a component needed for a healthy economic environment, where market forces can unfold and economic wealth can grow and spread throughout the entire body of society. Without rejecting this standpoint, which has worth beyond question, I will argue that the full assimilation of ethical principles into our institutional life and our daily life should be an end and not a means for any holistic approach to development, which is the heir to the ideal of the good life passed on to us by ancient philosophy. Finally, I wish to show how this manner of incorporating

moral concerns into development ought to be expressed more concretely in the notion of citizenship ethics and its institutional and political manifestations: thriving authentic democracies and a *status* of real citizenship for all the inhabitants of a human community.

Introduction

The issue of development occupies a central place among the many concerns demanding attention and urgent response from the countries of Latin America. Indeed it may be said that this great concern epitomizes the entire region's pressing demands, whether they be economic, political or even cultural in nature. The choice of routes by which we must overcome the age-old poverty of our populations, the way in which we must finally achieve democratic and therefore peaceful ways of life, and the way in which we must preserve our customs, traditions and values, constitute an overarching question: What must we Latin Americans do to make our region a space that will allow the fulfillment of human beings in their rich multiplicity of meanings and possibilities?

The debate over development already has a long history in our region. The fact that this debate is still taking place attests both to a recurring frustration and a strong will. Indeed, we have to admit that the goal set in this debate has long eluded us. Different attempts at economic and political reform, varied theories and formulas, many doctrines and dissimilar governments have come and gone through the countries of

the region and (except for a few fortunate exceptions) have left us nothing by way of tangible achievements that brings us closer to the development for which we yearn. Yet this goal of development remains alive among us, not merely as a shared dream, but also as a criterion for evaluating our collective performance, and as the end toward which the aims and actions of our governments must be adapted. For development, whether as an ongoing dream, critical attitude, or specific program for action, still occupies a central place on the horizon of Latin American thinking.

A great deal of time has passed since the days when development was viewed strictly as a problem of economic growth. Experience and reflection have enabled us to understand that equating the two was wrong and that the growth of wealth, of the goods produced in a society, is only one ingredient in development, and by no means its equivalent.

Indeed, today we are quite far—at least on the level of ideas and proposals—from those former ways of understanding the development of human societies in which the industrial might and financial prosperity of a country were seen as the destination, with no primordial concern for the everyday life of its inhabitants. Today, by contrast, it is widely accepted that equity and social inclusion or, to put it in other terms, the equitable distribution of opportunities, are aspects that are just as important, or even more important, than mere economic growth, if we really want to talk about development.

This contemporary conviction, whose

most concrete expression is perhaps the idea of *human development*, in itself constitutes an ethical approach to development. It especially points to a truth that should always have been obvious: that the goal of development makes sense and is socially desirable only if it is understood as an expansion of people's possibilities of achieving happiness, or of being fulfilled as human beings, as it is more commonly expressed today.

We are in debt to a handful of creative and bold thinkers for this timely reencounter between development, a discipline that is becoming increasingly technical and specialized on the one hand, and its indispensable roots in moral philosophy, that is, in ethics, on the other. The name of one of these thinkers cannot be omitted in even a passing mention, namely that of Ivan Illich, born of a radical humanism that expresses the necessarily holistic character—physical, spiritual and intellectual—of human development.¹ Of course such claims are incorporated into every current of thinking on development today, but they were quite radical when they were first formulated, i.e., at a time of rampant industrialism when the ideal of many nations was not so much to improve the living conditions of their inhabitants as to reach the stage of heavy industry and large-scale urban development.

Furthermore, it is clear that the encounter between ethics and development has been hindered, even after ideas as powerful as those of Illich, by the supposedly unbridgeable distance separating moral reasoning and economic reasoning. Eco-

nomics claimed for itself the rationality of calculation and efficiency, in an exclusive—and particularly excluding—manner, that is, leaving out any other consideration or principle of legitimacy. For its part, ethics was represented as guidance for the contested—perhaps hostile—conduct of strategic action, among which economic acts and those having to do with the business world have a special place in the contemporary world.

The result was a twofold reduction: development was viewed as reduced to its economic dimensions, and economics for its part appeared to be reduced to its aspect of calculating statistics and planning strategic action. Fortunately, the past two decades have witnessed a vigorous correction of this trend, especially in recent years. But that change did not occur by a mindless negation of the requirements of a healthy national economy, or of efficient entrepreneurial activity capitalizing on opportunity, but by building a bridge between those requirements and those posed by moral philosophy or, in simpler terms, those that arise out of a humane sensitivity. Those building this bridge—it should be stressed—have not been thinkers foreign to economics or to the sciences of administration, but indeed persons rooted in them. Amartya Sen is certainly a key figure in recalling this connection which has still not yielded all its fruits. His essential equation, by which development and freedom are two ways of referring to the same ideal, constitutes a bold formulation that must definitively disabuse development thinking of any unilateral technocratic temptation,

and open it even more to a sincere and committed dialogue with the older disciplines that explore the human condition and its possibilities, including philosophy. At the same time, the reflection performed and promoted by Bernardo Kliksberg for a number of years, connecting the requirements of a reasonable economic life back to the teachings of the Old Testament and its demand for solidarity with the dispossessed, deepens this demand for transformation that we pose to the world of production and trade. Of course this dialogue is even more audacious, insofar as in making it we are fully aware that we are marching against the established powers, and seemingly against the thrust of history; that is, at a time when this phenomenon we call *globalization* is driven overwhelmingly by economic forces and by its imperatives for profitability.

Ethics and Development Today: The Strategic Vision

The foregoing notwithstanding, it must be pointed out that this gradual incorporation of the ethical perspective into the institutional dialogue on development has thus far occurred most vigorously from the standpoint of promoting ethical conduct between individuals, organizations, and societies, as a way of fostering the smoother functioning of economic life. I call this a *strategic* consideration of the relationship between ethics and development, and I claim that, without being disparaged, it ought to be transcended for the sake of a

more substantial appreciation of the issue.

The primary way in which ethical behavior is seen as necessary and desirable for economic development is insofar as it generates trust. Such trust is absolutely necessary, especially in societies where market institutions are free to choose their actions, and furthermore where they make these choices through an internal and rational deliberation on what seems most satisfactory or profitable to them.

This is not the occasion to develop these ideas at length. Suffice it to say that from the standpoint that I am evoking, the best formula for prompting people to make decisions that are efficient for society as a whole (e.g., the decision to invest their funds in some productive enterprises; the decision to purchase certain goods; the decision to become involved in group projects) is that there be an environment in which these persons have to presume, with reasonable certainty, that those with whom they are interacting are in good faith. At this point it should be specified that the notion of *good faith* in this context does not point to some positive or community virtue, such as solidarity or altruism; rather it refers to the willingness of people to play fair, to respect the rules of the game established in society in general, and between the parties in particular. The inviolability of contracts, the reasonable expectation of receiving fair treatment, the certainty that we will not be denied a fair price for our efforts or our goods after a transaction—and most of all, the conviction that if good faith between the parties is lacking, the state will always be ready to guarantee that agree-

ments are faithfully observed—constitute the backbone of a dynamic economy, where resources circulate easily and where, in the often repeated formulation of Adam Smith, private selfishness generates public virtue.

I have pointed out, and it is well to repeat it here, that this perspective should not be disparaged in the least. That point is well-known in the countries that in the 1980s and 1990s switched from statist economies to free economies, such as the nations of Latin America or, with a more radical reversal, the nations of the former Soviet bloc. This change from closed economies to open economies was not accompanied by a transformation of habits and institutions, understood as collective mental realities that condition our behaviors. If the opportunities opened by stabilization and economic liberalization did not render the expected benefits of sustained growth, that is to some extent connected to the absence of such trust, which is corroded and blocked by habits of public and private corruption that are still very deep-seated and widespread in our countries.

Yet it is relevant to point to the other way of considering trust—arising out of the ethically guided behaviors of persons—as a resource for development. I have in mind the possibility of generating networks of operational solidarity between the inhabitants of a country, a province, a village, a neighborhood, in order to collectively solve shared problems, and to satisfy a set of needs that otherwise remain unmet.

In recent years social scientists have extensively developed this idea under the

name of *social capital*,² a concept in active dialogue with contemporary political philosophy, and the positive assessment of human society which is found at the heart of communitarian doctrine.

Our ability to associate is unquestionably one of the most powerful resources we human beings have for fulfilling our goals. However, the existence of this resource cannot always be taken for granted; often it is a resource that has to be created, and such creation depends very much on building trust between people. In this realm as well, the existence of ethically-oriented behavior also occupies an exceedingly important place. Again it should be noted that we have before us is an approach to the relationships between ethics and development whose value and importance are unquestionable, especially in countries like ours, where material resources are always scarce in comparison to the overwhelming volume of unmet needs.³

Development and Human Fulfillment

Notwithstanding everything said thus far, I now want to point out that a thoroughgoing integration of ethical issues into the debate over development requires a kind of thinking that transcends the understanding of morally-guided behaviors as *resources* for improving the quality of life. Rather, resources will have to be conceived as the *substance* of this better life, of this good life to which our nations legitimately aspire. In presenting this idea, I will really be merely indicating tasks for future reflection by the academic and political community involved

in development issues.

After a long and fruitful meditation on the nature of development and paths to attaining it, Amartya Sen has said that it consists of “a process of expanding the freedoms enjoyed by individuals.”⁴ That is a valiant and challenging formulation despite its apparent simplicity. It is so, because it means taking the studies of an increasingly sophisticated, increasingly institutionalized, and indeed technically arcane discipline back to one of these primary truths behind which and out of which philosophy operates. Expansion of freedoms, attaining of happiness, conquest of the good life: all these are alternate ways of stating what we currently call human fulfillment. Development is thus the pursuit and creation of the conditions in which human beings may be fulfilled as such.

Only with extreme caution do I approach this issue: the meaning of human fulfillment is one of the eternal problems of all philosophy, ancient or modern, and it would be foolish to attempt to give a final or original response to the problem on this occasion or any other. Hence I opt to pursue this thesis over sure and certainly well-trodden paths, by noting that among the various elements that may converge on the fulfillment of our human nature, the possibility of seeing our dignity respected and taken into account by those around us holds an important place. Following a path opened by Hegel, we may call this element the need for *recognition*, a central element in our humanity, that which grants meaning to our social existence and without which no genuine situation of well-being may be

conceived, even if our other (physical or material) needs are reasonably met. Moreover, such a need for *recognition* is not only a good that we grant to others or that others concede to us, but an act of our own consciousness—the willingness to perceive and accept the other as *Other*— by which we are fulfilled and gain entry into the realm of the ethical. “Well ordered justice begins with the Other,” Emmanuel Levinas has written, in developing a philosophical project in which the full recovery of metaphysics and ethics converge to constitute a contemporary radical humanism.⁵

To speak of “recognition” in societies such as those that we are familiar with today —multitudinous societies governed by states ruled by abstract regulations, with ways of life subject to the pace and impersonality imposed by the modern world —means that we must search for that good on two levels: that of everyday life where people interact directly, face to face; and that of institutional life, in which society appears to be governed by mechanisms of general validity which function impersonally. In pointing this out, I want to say that in today’s world, ethics becomes present in our collective lives in particular spaces, namely that of citizenship ethics and that of institutional policy, and through the assimilation of values of respect and acceptance of *others* whom— as inhabitants of a mass and impersonal society—we will never have the occasion or need to meet as individual beings. Institutional policy includes norms of respect and impartial protection by the state and its agents toward all citizens, making no differences based on

socioeconomic, cultural or any other kind of criterion.

Ethics for development, creating possibilities of self-fulfillment, thus appears as citizenship ethics that is fruitful in the space of democracy. From this standpoint it is the creation of a shared life where all persons equally enjoy this irreplaceable good, which is not a means but an end in itself, which we call recognition. I now propose to say some words about the idea of democracy which must be incorporated into any debate on development in Latin America.

Democracy, Space for Citizenship

Speaking about ethics and development is impossible without asking at the same time whether real democratic life exists. The idea of development has been emancipated from its strictly economic conception to be situated rather in the broad territory of concern for well-being. Our well-being, we know, depends on the satisfaction of our basic material needs, but it likewise derives from the fulfillment of our moral aspirations. Certainly these aspirations have varied throughout history and have been different depending on the particularities of the various civilizations. In our world today, the elementary horizon of moral well-being is that of respect for the dignity inherent in each of us. This general principle was anticipated in very diverse ways by the wisest thinkers of the modern world. In speaking of the Enlightenment, Kant identified the obligation of thinking for oneself as the unavoidable mandate of our age, and he thus situated the ideal

of the autonomy of the rational subject at the center of our social world. In the early 19th century, Hegel centered his intensive political reflection on the demand of recognition as the core of human sociability. Later in that same century, Alexis de Tocqueville proclaimed that the world was advancing inevitably toward equality. Autonomy, recognition, equality—ideals at the center of our social imagination—are also the criterion of our well-being as members of a political and civic community.

In our civilization it is the democratic system that guarantees compliance with such ideals. In saying this, I am also implicitly affirming that democracy is much more than a set of rules for attaining and exercising power. Understood in its institutional dimension, democracy is identified with a social arrangement on the distribution and practice of power. But at the same time the democratic order is a way of life, an environment, the space in which each of our own ordinary and yet singular and irreplaceable existences unfolds. And just as democracy, in its institutional dimension, takes on reality in this complex of rules that concurrently both establish and control power, in its dimension as the environment of social life—*ecological* life, as it were—it exists only in its protagonists, namely citizens.

I have said that there is no development rightly understood, if there is no democracy. I must now point out that a democratic regime is nothing but an empty shell, a mendacious formality, if the subjects living in it do not possess the quality of citizens. Political science—overflowing with

comparisons of different national experiences—teaches us, however, that the quality of citizenship is not something monolithic that either exists fully with no fissures or is utterly non-existent. Citizenship is rather a multifaceted and dynamic condition that undergoes advances (and retreats) dictated by the specific history of the various societies. This realization should not lead us to weaken the intensity of our demands on existing democracies; rather it invites us to call attention to the twofold responsibility of our societies: they must simultaneously seek the establishment of their democracies as institutional systems, and expand the condition of full citizens among their inhabitants.

Just as there is a continual danger of reducing democracy to its electoral aspect, we also face the constant risk of understanding citizenship solely in its political dimension. The classic theory of the phenomenon of the citizen tells us that it is the result of a gradual extension of the rights of subject.⁶ These rights are not only political; they are also civil and social, and they all seem to be encompassed in this great conquest of our age which is the doctrine of human rights. It is important to keep this multiple nature of citizenship in mind, for otherwise it becomes difficult to understand in what sense a genuine citizen existence can actually become a source of moral well-being for persons, and therefore be the expression of the holistic development for which we yearn.

Reduced to its political aspect, citizenship would be attained whenever someone participates in the phenomenon of power in his or her society, whether through

the simple act of voting or through some other activity entailing greater involvement. Even so, when the phenomenon is demarcated in that fashion, there always remains the question about what satisfaction, what degree of self-fulfillment, a person may really draw from such activity. When we ask whether citizenship is merely this ability that we have to be involved in the institutional guidance of public affairs, we raise a question with much deeper consequences: what value does democracy really have as a space for human fulfillment?

For guiding these reflections I have chosen a conviction shared by noted thinkers on the subject of democracy: it is primarily a way of life. This claim situates the problem before us on a very broad level of reflection at the confluence of ethics, psychology and philosophical anthropology, as well as other lines of thought about our human existence.

This space is dominated by a central concept, that of *sociability*—that is, the necessary, not contingent, character of our existence in society. An acute contemporary essayist, Tzvetan Todorov, has recalled that in the Western philosophical tradition there are at least two ways of dealing with the problem.⁷ On the one hand, there are those like Montaigne, Hobbes or Freud, who accept this social existence as an unavoidable and necessary evil with which human beings must learn to coexist. Others, like Aristotle or Rousseau, likewise admit the necessary character of this shared life, but they do not view it as the source of a malady, but rather as the very condition of human fulfillment. We are

incomplete beings on our way to completion, and this promise of the fulfillment of our nature, this possibility of being what we are called to be, can only be achieved through our existence with others, through our extension in them, through our openness to those who are both different from and similar to us.

In the tradition of democratic thought, we find a similar dichotomy with certain nuances of difference. From a strictly liberal understanding, democracy is intended to guarantee that individuals can pursue their particular legitimate ends through peaceful and legal means, and with as little interference as possible from the state or from other members of society. Democracy is thus a social arrangement, a system of cautions designed for the fulfillment of an already complete human being, a subject understood as *homo clausus*, in the apt phrasing of Norbert Elias.⁸

The same is not true of the other current of democratic thought, which views in this system the possibility that human beings may bond in relations of solidarity and civility and may live out their coexistence—that is, their community in citizenship—as an opportunity for mutual complementation.

Naturally, for this more ambitious understanding of democracy to become real, the sphere of political rights and responsibilities must be transcended so as to think of the properties that such a system of shared life must have. The possibility of any citizen existence of passivity toward others or toward the state is, in principle, ruled out. Such a passive existence—viable when our

hope is merely not to be hindered in our own affairs or when we place all our hopes in the tutelage of the state or the government—can only lead, in the best of cases, to apathetic civic life, and in the worst of cases, to bastardized forms of democracy, such as relationships of civic serfdom and clientelism, those longstanding evils of Latin American republics.

The core of an effort to build democracy aimed at setting up a space of human fulfillment—that is, of development—is the rootedness and expansion of an active citizenry, a regime of civic existence in which participation is not the exception but the rule.

If democracy is to become a vital force among us, and if it is to impose a more human character on our societies, it will be by constituting a stronger, fuller, and healthier civil society that will act as a true *agorá*, a public space where citizens converge to engage in shared learning in a common place.

It is not by chance that at this point I mention the idea of learning. If we are thinking about democracy and citizenship as occasions of fulfillment, we must likewise view them as spaces for self-education and mutual education. What do we learn in these spaces? Not necessarily technical or even theoretical knowledge, but something subtler and more difficult to define, which some thinkers tend to call *civic virtues*, the first of which is no doubt the heartfelt acceptance of our mutual obligations.

The historian Raúl Porras Barrenechea once lamented the lack in Peru of what he called *civic charity*. With that beautiful ex-

pression he may have had in mind this conviction about our mutual obligations that we so much miss in our shared common life. The conviction that we are all in the same boat, observing the rules, moderately seeking the common good, is not so much a gracious concession that we make to others, as it is a moral obligation whose fulfillment enhances our condition as rational and also sensitive human beings.

We learn these elemental virtues through a respectful relationship with our fellow human beings, for it is in this relationship established between beings who are assumed to be free by nature, and claim to be autonomous because they have chosen to practice their rationality, that we integrate the sense of duty into our way of being. If we learn to be citizens who honor their commitments to others, it is ultimately because in this participatory relationship we will have understood that it is good in itself, and not because we obtain benefit or avoid harm by meeting our obligation. The Spanish thinker, Adela Cortina, has observed rightly—in a variation on Pascal—that the “reasons of the heart far surpass those of fear and calculation.”⁹ But for that to be true in our countries, to transcend the paradoxical situation of living in democracies inhabited by serfs, we must advance toward an everyday regime of citizen participation.

Human Rights

I have claimed that the ethical approach to development must necessarily take the form of a reflection on the consolidation of

democracies, not only as systems for alternating power, but also, and especially, as an environment of shared life where people all equally enjoy the recognition owed to them by their very condition as human beings. I must now draw attention to how far we are from this ideal in Latin America, as evidenced by the exclusion and marginalization suffered by a huge portion of the inhabitants of our countries, and as is shown most palpably and painfully by the recurring history of human rights violations, and the indifference of state and society to those violations. Despite encouraging signs, such as those now evident in Argentina, we are still living in a profoundly anti-ethical situation in this regard, and it places serious question marks over our current efforts at development.

In my country, Peru, we have recently undergone an experience like that lived by other nations of the region such as Argentina, Chile, El Salvador and Guatemala: a painful investigation into a history of massive crimes and human rights violations. That investigation has been carried out with the aim of building, on the basis of a courageous recognition of the past, a future for justice. We have recognized the dignity of the victims expressed in acts of reparation and justice, and in major reforms of a state capable of recognizing its debt to its citizens to whom it denied this elemental form of institutional recognition, namely protection and basic care.

I had the privilege of living through this experience of retrieving the past as Chairman of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Peru. That experience was

both exhilarating and heartrending for all those of us who were involved in it. That commission, which completed its work in 2003, documented the great human losses created in the wake of the violence—almost 70,000 dead—and it detailed the horrific crimes committed both by subversive organizations and by state security forces between 1980 and 2000. Additionally, it recommended to the state that reparations of various kinds be made to the victims, that those guilty of serious crimes be brought to justice, and that institutional reforms be made to lead the country toward reconciliation based on a new pact between the state and society.¹⁰

As has occurred previously in other countries in the region, seven months after these recommendations were made, and after the exposure of the terrible truth of the violence, indifference still reigns in our society, and the state in its various forms (executive, legislative, judicial) is plainly reluctant or slow to assume the consequences, lessons, and duties emerging from this history. And this passivity—I presume to say—imposes certain doubts on whether a democracy worthy of the name has a future in Peru.

I venture to mention the case of my own country because I think it shows most categorically the great tasks of learning and raising sensitivity that lie before us if we really want to incorporate an ethical perspective into our idea of development. Development will not be attained—or will be attained only partially and imperfectly—through a sustained economic take-off in our countries. Even if this take-off even-

tually translates into greater circulation of social wealth, development is essentially an activity of human fulfillment and does not depend solely on our access to material goods.

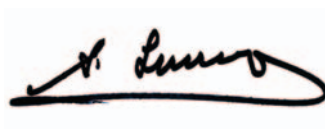
Summary and Conclusion

The idea that I have sought to communicate in these few minutes is simple. I hope that its clarity has compensated for its lack of detail. As we stand facing the problem of the relationships between ethics and development, I have begun by recalling how these ties are already matter for reflection and work, albeit from a specific angle: that of the importance of ethical conduct for the best operation of the market and for enhancing the capacity of association between people for the sake of satisfying shared needs. As worthwhile as this focus, which I have called *strategic*, undoubtedly is, I have nevertheless argued for the need to transcend it and complement it with another approach that recognizes the *substantive*, and not merely instrumental, place of ethics in development. Thus as *trust* constitutes the core of the strategic approach to the relationship between ethics and development, I maintain that *recognition* takes on a central role in the substantive approach to this same problem. Such recognition, as a fundamental element in human fulfillment, must find spaces where it may be embodied in contemporary societies, characterized by their mass and impersonal character. And this space, according to the argument that I have presented, is that of citizen ethics and of democracy. Hence, I have said that an

ethical approach to development must take the form of a reflection on, and a commitment to, building genuine democracies, not reduced to their institutional or electoral dimension, but apprehended as ways of life. It is in this realm, in which the state recognizes and protects the dignity of its citizens, and they in turn recognize one another mutually as beings of absolute worth, that the conditions can be created for the human fulfillment of all the inhabitants of a national community.

Embodying in reality a substantially ethical concept of development is certainly a demanding and overwhelming task for which our political systems do not seem to be prepared. Yet it must be recalled that social, economic, or political development

has always been conceived as a long-term task, a project and a dream that demands constancy and strategic vision, political will and personal commitments. Hence we must place our hope in this long term; but we must do so on the condition that at the same time we understand that it will never be attained if we do not begin to reflect, disseminate, and incorporate immediately into our regional and national goals, a notion of development based completely on the ethics of recognition —or to state it in a word that should resonate strongly with Christians, the ethics of *compassion*.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "S. Lerner", with a long horizontal flourish underneath.

NOTES

1. Ivan Illich, *Celebration of Awareness* (London, 1971).
2. Robert Putnam (ed.), *El declive del capital social* (Barcelona, 2003).
3. Raúl Atria et al., *Capital social y reducción de la pobreza en América Latina y el Caribe: en busca de un nuevo paradigma* (Santiago de Chile, 2003).
4. Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom* (New York, 1999).
5. Emmanuel Lévinas, “La filosofía y la idea del infinito”, 1957.
6. Giovanni Sartori, *Teoría de la democracia* (Madrid, 1988).
7. Tzvetan Todorov, *La vida en común. Un ensayo de antropología general* (Madrid, 1995).
8. Norbert Elias, *Sociología fundamental* (Barcelona, 1982).
9. Adela Cortina, *Ciudadanos del mundo. Hacia una teoría de la ciudadanía* (Madrid, 1988).
10. Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Peru, *Final Report* (Lima, 2004).

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CONVICTIONS THAT SABOTAGE PROGRESS

Marcos Aguinis

I am honored and happy to be here, and I want to tell you that while I was listening to the detailed introduction of the speaker, I was reminded of that anecdote about Borges when he, being blind, was walking down a street in Buenos Aires; he was recognized by an admirer, who pounced on him, seized him by the shoulders and began to shake him, saying, “You are Borges! You are Borges!” And poor Borges, rolling his blind eyes, replied, “Sometimes, sometimes.” So, sometimes I’m the one they were talking about a moment ago, and sometimes I’m something else.

So ... what is prompting me to deal with this issue precisely at the Inter-American Development Bank? I remember how a pair of boys were annoyed because their grandfather always had a correct answer to all their questions. So they said to themselves, “It can’t be that our grandfather really knows everything. We’re going to trick him. We’re going to try to make him be wrong.” One of them thought up the

following: they would show him a little bird from a distance and ask him whether it was alive or dead. If their grandfather said it was dead, they would release the bird to show that it was alive. And if he replied that it was alive, they would strangle the bird to show it was dead. So they decided to put it to their grandfather, and one of them asked him, “Grandfather, is this bird alive or dead?” Grandfather looked at him and said, “It depends on your intention, son.”

I obviously have an intention when I bring this subject up here. I am bringing a difficult topic to a place devoted to the good cause of encouraging development. And this development is often blocked by rocks placed in the road, which aren’t simply about economic issues, but have to do with ideas, attitudes, customs, and deep-seated convictions. Why is it that Latin America, which is a continent overflowing with natural resources, and also overflowing with human resources, when compared

with other continents, does not achieve the development it ought to have? What is happening to Africa, which is even worse off than we are? When I was doing graduate work in Paris in the 1960s, I ran into lots of African students who amazed me with their bright-colored clothes as well as by their knowledge of Latin America, and I confessed to them with shame: “You know a lot more about Latin America than I do about Africa.” And they replied casually, “That’s because we want to be very familiar with Latin America so as not to repeat your mistakes.” And look at how that continent is doing!

What is happening to the Muslim world, which has vast energy wealth, and of course very rich families, but also huge poor areas, where people live in extreme poverty? Why did Spain and Portugal lag behind, if they were the countries that plundered Latin America, the world and their colonies, hauled away their wealth, and even so, went into decline? And why did countries that were marginal colonies like Australia, New Zealand, and Canada prosper?

Multiculturalism

I was in England when a minister of an African Muslim country was interviewed on television. I heard the reporter ask him why female circumcision was still being practiced in his country. The minister took offense and said: “You Europeans are always concerned about these things, but we’re going to deal with them ourselves because they’re part of our culture. You

ought to dedicate your efforts to getting us out of poverty.” So I thought that if I had been facing this minister at that time, I would have looked him right in the eye and said: “You’re suffering from extreme poverty because you have a culture that mutilates women’s genitals: that’s why you’re poor, because of a culture that has primitive fixations that don’t deserve respect, and aren’t helpful for growth!”

In the West, after the huge guilt that we bear because of the history of colonialism, exploitation, slavery, etc.—all the evils that we have caused—a vision toward the diversity of cultures, one previously closed off, has been developing. We have learned to respect what is different; and that is good, no doubt about it. Cultural relativism and multiculturalism came to the forefront, but this multiculturalism collides with another great development produced in the West: that of individual rights and human rights.

Inevitably, a painful question emerges: is it more important to defend individual rights and human rights or to defend a culture that mutilates female genitals? Let us be honest enough not to close our eyes to this contradiction: if human rights are universal, we cannot accept genital mutilation of young girls who cannot defend themselves in any way. Hence, we have to face up to this contradiction, which is serious, difficult and which leads us to a conclusion that I regard as reasonable: we can and must respect what is different, provided it does not injure universal moral values. Are there universal values? I think so. But some prefer to take refuge in psychotic eclipses and deny the obvious.

What is psychotic thought? That which does not use logic. It can be illustrated with a very simple example, the clearest I can offer you. The director of an insane asylum is very worried because the budget is not enough to serve the large number of patients in the institution. So he decides to release a number of inmates. But of course he has to release them with some justification so he will not be subject to an administrative ruling later that could harm him. He decides to use a very simple test of logic on them, one that will enable him to show that these individuals are ready to live outside the insane asylum. He has the inmates form a line to ask them a question in basic arithmetic. The first one comes up and he asks him, "How much is six times six?" "A thousand." "No," says the director, "that's wrong, let's have the next." He asks the next inmate the same question, "How much is six times six?" This man seems as though he is going to answer correctly because he wrinkles his brow as though he were squeezing his neurons, and he answers "Tuesday!" "Oh no, he is worse than the first one," thinks the director. "Okay, let's have the third ... How much is six times six?" And the third answers, "Thirty six." "Good, very good," whispers the director relieved, "At least I'll be able to release one." And he begins to sign the release order, but it occurs to him to ask: "Tell me, how did you get that answer?" "Very easy," says the man, "I divided a thousand by Tuesday..."

This utterly illogical thinking is psychotic thinking, and this psychotic thinking is often what prevails in international poli-

tics, in national politics, and in the politics of aid. We do not realize that a thousand is being divided by Tuesday in many of the well intentioned actions that are carried out with effort but fail to achieve good results.

Multiculturalism is connected to ideas that became fashionable some years ago—perhaps some decades ago—which also question progress. They say that really there is no progress, that progress is an ideology that began in the late 19th century, but that humankind does not really advance. As an example they take the fact that the works of art in antiquity are perhaps superior to many works of art done in the contemporary age; so where is the progress? The same is said of moral progress, which is very relative because, for example, in ancient times there were also very cruel people and we are still cruel; so where is the progress? we ask once more.

It has, however, to be kept in mind that an average lifespan is longer, that people have greater comfort, that quality of life is higher, that communications and transportation are marvelous; in short, there really is progress and its positive facets are obvious, so much so that those of us who enjoy its benefits would not like to have them taken away from us. Howls of anger go up when the power goes off, when water is no longer drinkable, when phones don't answer, when public transport is late, when there are no medications, when heat or cooling is insufficient. But all of this is forgotten when the seductive critiques of progress appear.

These ideas are also opposed to the flow of history, that is, to the existence of a

universal history. Multiculturalism points out that it isn't true that some countries are historically more advanced than others because—it claims—all countries are at an equivalent level. Differences of culture create the illusion of superiority, but it does not exist. And here, in my judgment, a thousand is being divided by Tuesday.

Why? Because it complicates promoting new technologies and scientific advances that would harm the civilization or society that we want to have advanced. Technologies often collide with their ancestral customs and would not contribute anything good. For multiculturalists, discouraging female genital mutilation through the advances of psychology sounds like cultural arrogance. That is why they say some technology and development are assaulting certain cultures, causing a kind of global sameness. That's what the much ballyhooed globalization is about. These are convictions that, in my view, hinder progress. They are ideas that regard scientific and technological advances as aggressive, colonialist, imperialist, racist, globalizing, and contemptuous.

The Meaning of Justice

Another of the convictions standing in the way of progress is the difficulty in many countries with regard to the abstraction of *justice* as an institution. Borges said—I cite him again—that Argentines, and perhaps Latin Americans (or perhaps, extending it a little more, the so-called “Third World”), have trouble abstracting, it is hard for them to understand what the state is, what justice

is, what institutions are. Hence, stealing from the state means stealing from nothing; it doesn't exist, it's a fiction. Abstract thinking, which cannot be apprehended, is replaced by concrete thought. A human being is robbed, a bank is robbed, but robbing an institution is just not understood. Hence in a large portion of the world the concept of the institution of justice as something that must be respected beyond what can be perceived concretely doesn't exist.

I will illustrate this with an anecdote about Charles Darwin, who visited the Rio de la Plata when he made his famous voyage. When he entered the territory of the province of Buenos Aires, after having also been in Uruguay, he realized something that he recorded in his memoirs. It had to do with reasonable people, good willed people, who justified a criminal because they thought he was robbing the government, not the people. That is, this thief was doing an act of justice, because governments, which are always corrupt, are the real thieves. Hence, punishing the criminal was something that did not occur to these people.

In some places—and as an Argentine I am very familiar with it—the well-known “native sharpness” [*viveza criolla*]; we speak of “native sharpness” and it ought to be “Argentine sharpness,” but the same thing is true elsewhere. You know that “sharpness” is an institution that developed very intensely, and is regarded as a virtue. The sharp one always wins. The opposite of the sharp one is the “sucker” [*zonzzo*]. In Argentina, the worst crime of all is to be a sucker. And so—I go back to citing Borges

— a criminal once said to him: “Look Mr. Borges: I’m here in jail for murder, not for being a sucker.” Indeed, the most worrisome thing in these countries isn’t committing a crime; what is worrisome is being captured. If you commit a crime and manage not to get thrown in jail, then you are sharp, you win applause. And this is a distortion of *justice*, the topic I am talking about now. Such a distortion is directly, clearly, and vigorously opposed to progress and development.

The Argentine author Marco Denevi once wrote that in our societies people are intelligent, or stupid, or sharp. The intelligent one is the one who looks for the *exitus*. *Exitus* is the way out; by extension, it would be the way out of the labyrinth, a trap, or a threat. A person who had landed in the United States but couldn’t speak English thought he was in a very generous country because they always welcomed him by wishing him success [*éxito* in Spanish]: he was continually coming across the word *Exit!*...

Indeed, *exitus* does mean “a way out,” a positive way out, of course. The word “stupid” comes from Latin *stupidus*, which means “calm, paralyzed.” The stupid one doesn’t know what to do. The sharp one, on the other hand, casts the blame somewhere else and draws advantage wherever possible.

The conclusion drawn by Marco Denevi is that if at any time the sharp ones take over the government, they begin to devour each other and end up sinking the ship, trying to win out over one another. Someone who is sharp never brings about

a real solution. Actually, the sharp one is success-oriented, he wants to achieve an easy immediate triumph, even if the gain is small, and by breaking the law if necessary. He is eager to bolster his self-esteem, or to have the “spectators”—the audience—applaud him. The really successful one, however, is one who isn’t in a hurry to obtain a benefit, one who decides to invest time and effort because he aspires to a truly noteworthy result.

In underdeveloped countries, it is the wrongful success-oriented type that prevails, not the really successful. There is no patience for long-term investment, there is no strategic vision; haste and impatience are the norm, and people act from day to day, with no regard for the law. And of course this conspires against development.

Misconstrued Equality

Another conviction that sabotages development is wrongly understood egalitarianism. Let me speak here with insulting clarity. In two days I’ll be leaving Washington. So I’m going to give you a very specific example. The Bolivian indigenous leader Felipe Quispe recently said, “If one portion of Bolivians puts on shoes and another portion puts on sandals, let’s all wear sandals.” The solution he is proposing seems to be fair. But I would say to him, “Look Mr. Quispe: if one portion of Bolivians wears shoes and the other part wears sandals, let’s all make a great effort so that the entire nation can wear shoes.”

Sure, it’s much easier to spread things around enthusiastically, in a hurry; impose

equality in a week and so everyone is wearing sandals. But that is leveling downward, and it is justice that smells bitter. Actually, improving the quality of life demands something more important than pronouncements and revolutionary violence: it requires developing the culture of effort, technology, imagination, and discipline.

Within egalitarianism, creating wealth doesn't seem to matter. We are bogged down with the idea that all we need to do is distribute what we have. But here comes a question: "So once we've finished distributing what we have, what happens then?" No one talks about incentives for investment that create new wealth. Of course the idea that wealth needs to be created and then it will automatically trickle down over society doesn't always work out; instead, often what happens is an exasperating polarization of wealth. It's true, but the greatest polarization of wealth—clearly shown by statistics—takes place in the most backward countries! The countries that really grow, the prosperous countries, the countries where investment is made, where the rule of law exists, where property is respected, where the justice system works and the powers of the state oversee each other, do not show such extreme polarization. A proof of that is the way things work in the Scandinavian countries or in other European countries. In short, the poorer a country is the more blatant is the polarization of wealth, and that happens in Africa, Latin America and the Muslim world: the poorer, the more polarized.

In other words, more progress, more

development, and more wealth creation means less polarization. This is an idea on which we have to work very energetically, because wealth creation is what is least important in countries where it ought to matter most. We run into leaders who propose solutions that aren't connected to the tools that generate wealth, that entail investment to create jobs and thus lessen hunger, exclusion, and unemployment. The only thing discussed is redistribution, and there has to be redistribution, but it must not be forgotten that there is no point in redistributing what doesn't exist. Otherwise, we're dividing a thousand by Tuesday.

We know that investment means money, and money has two absolutely irremediable defects. First it is cowardly, and second, it is selfish. It is cowardly because it is never going to invest in places where there is no security. It only accepts places where this investment is going to be respected. In addition, money is selfish: it is only invested if it can produce earnings. If it doesn't produce earnings, money looks for somewhere else to go. Of course, the state and society have to make sure that the profits generated are legitimate, that they are not disproportionate; but that depends on the effectiveness of the regulatory agencies, of the evenhandedness with which contracts are signed, and public property is managed. This is another topic, one that is quite complex, and fundamental. But if we strive for progress, there has to be investment, and investment has to respond to these two defects displayed by money and that we cannot eliminate in any manner. Yet there are still some leaders who detest

investments. They speak about “shipping off wealth,” “imperialist domination,” “caving in to globalization,” and “piracy.” These are convictions that sabotage peoples, for sure, but they are not condemned outright. Some even regard them as progressive convictions. Again, a thousand divided by Tuesday.

The Problem of Education

Another major issue, one that gets very little attention, is the topic of education; it is a very serious problem. In Argentina, shortly after democracy was restored, a praiseworthy initiative was set in motion, namely the National Pedagogical Congress. This was the Second Pedagogical Congress, because the first had been held at the end of the 19th century, while even Domingo Faustino Sarmiento was still alive. At that memorable Congress the groundwork was laid for a phenomenal development of education. It made Argentina a country at the forefront of culture and education. Thanks to that impulse, Argentina became one of the ten most prosperous nations in the world.

This second Congress sought to reply to the first one. It was in the mid-1980s and I was then the Argentine Minister of Culture. Even though this was not a job that belonged to my area, strictly speaking, I took part and I witnessed the great effort that was made to get all of society involved. But society did not become mobilized at all. That Congress turned out utterly bland. It was a Congress practically limited to the government, and it had no wider social

impact.

By contrast, one island in the Far East, a tiny country called Singapore, made a superior effort in the area of culture, knowledge, science, and technology. Today Singapore is a power to be reckoned with. Sustained investment in knowledge and technology transformed that small island into a powerful nation. The wealth of nations now comes by way of knowledge. The old theory that wealth means piling up gold and silver, as was believed in the age of the discovery of the Americas, is today outmoded. The theory that wealth consists in having lots of natural resources is finished. Wealth comes by way of developing knowledge, science, and technology. Countries that do not have natural resources, such as Japan and Israel, are models, because with knowledge, science and technology they were able to comfortably overcome what they were lacking in resources. On the other hand, countries with vast wealth in natural resources, such as those in Latin America, Africa, and the Muslim world, are sunk in poverty, with structural conflicts that keep them from taking off or developing, no matter how much aid they are given. They do not make the internal changes that the prosperous countries have made. They have not broken free from regressive, lethal convictions.

It is not simply that education is in short supply, but that education is being distorted. It is the kind that confuses making things easy with real educational gains. For many years “educational gains” have meant those that make it easier to

graduate, with less effort, with less work. Making things easy like this is corrosive, and it is deep-seated in our societies. While certainly some problems are peculiar to Argentina—and I wouldn't like to bore you by talking about them here—it is also true that they are found throughout Latin America: they are connected to this kind of education that gives up on effort, that does not pursue a serious commitment to the university, to secondary school, to primary school. A country like Argentina whose cultural development was once outstanding, as a result of seeking the easy way out for decades, has fallen into situations that are crude. All levels of education have declined: university, secondary, primary; it is now politically incorrect to talk about university entrance exams, or to talk about charging fees. Taking the easy way out has led to decline; there is scandalous evidence in the tests given to students who wish to attend university. For example, these tests include questions like, "Who lived first: Napoleon or Jesus" and some answer "Napoleon." I won't even go into spelling errors. They answer that an analgesic is an antibiotic for pain. When asked about the parts of a horse, they mention the saddle.

Tendency to See Oneself as Victim

The last aspect that I would like to indicate as a conviction that is negative for development—and I'll close with this—is that in backward countries there is a growing tendency toward victimology, to regard themselves as victims: countries that consider themselves the victims of an evil from

outside, that always cast the blame somewhere else. This victim situation has often been supported by theories developed with great academic prestige, but they are false: I have in mind the well-known "dependency theory," promoted for decades by ECLAC. Dependency theory has furthered the idea that poor countries are that way because they are victims. And being a victim, both individually and collectively, is the best way to fail to find solutions.

Individuals who regard themselves as victims—let us think of it from the individual standpoint to make it easier to understand—wait for someone else to come by to solve their problem for them. The victim says: "I am a poor angel. I'm a well intentioned individual, I do all I can, but everyone else is blocking my path, they beat me, they destroy me, they close doors in my face." The victim is generally a resentful individual. Resentment is rancor connected to what is gone, to the sensation that one was the subject of an injustice, and therefore this injustice committed in the past has to be corrected in the past. The victim is a tragic subject because he or she is seeking what cannot be granted. The resentful individual is one who mortgages his or her present and future to correct the past. Once a group of theologians—perhaps I'm getting into science fiction—was discussing whether anything was impossible to God—what a question!—and the answer was Yes, that indeed there was something impossible even for God: changing the past. However, resentful people want to change the past, and they want the injustice inflicted on them to be corrected

in the past, and hence they are never satisfied. They think they have the right to destroy, wreck, and shatter. But nothing is corrected with that violence, and their misfortune increases.

That is why in countries where the sensation of being a victim prevails, where resentment prevails, the tendency to protest is quite strong. I ask myself and I ask you: Do protests solve anything? Isn't there a very important qualitative leap between protest and proposal? These words—*protesta* and *propuesta*—sound a lot alike, but a protest is emitted when someone is unable to solve a problem by oneself. The baby in the crib is cold and cries, that is, it protests because of the cold, so someone else will come to wrap it up; or if it is hungry, it cries, it protests because it is hungry, so someone will come to feed it. The baby in a crib cannot handle things for himself or herself. The individual who is in prison, behind bars, protests because he is asking something that others have to provide him. Therefore, one who protests is revealing impotence; one who protests is saying: "I am incapable of resolving this, I am protesting so that someone else will come to resolve it for me." That is, he or she is in a passive, dependent position.

Someone proposing is in a different situation: proposal means initiative, dynamic role, and responsibility. "I propose and I make myself responsible for what I propose. If I succeed, I will be the author of this success and I will deserve to be applauded. If I fail, I will have to try again, but I will be responsible for the failure." A protester, on the other hand, is not respon-

sible for anything; a protester is protesting only so that someone else will be responsible for the solution. And if the solution doesn't come, it will be the other person's fault.

Protest tends to be associated with violence, and violence creates a climate of lack of social peace which conspires against investment arriving, because investment is not attractive in countries where violence is taking place. In other words, a protester, someone who creates violence, is generating conditions for things to get worse. He is going against his own interests—dividing a thousand by Tuesday.

However, the conviction that protest should be backed and supported is deep-seated in our peoples. In decades past, for example, protest has been manifested—and is still being manifested—through guerrilla war, which destroys, but it is not clear what it builds. Let us recall a worldwide icon born in Argentina, like Che Guevara, who said that one, two, three Vietnams, ten Vietnams had to be created, that the planet had to be set on fire. Fine: generate a heroic, marvelous, worldwide protest; but what then? Where is the work, *his* work, which has improved the quality of life of peoples where he fostered violence? Where is the promised new man? It is not true that violence and destruction move things forward. The idea of violence praised by Nietzsche, praised by Marx, as the midwife of progress, was refuted by Mahatma Gandhi and by innumerable experiences. In reality, violence produces suffering and obstructs development. It is another mistaken, reactionary, lethal conviction.

I think that if we dare to be politically incorrect and go against the tide that has transformed these bad convictions into respectable convictions, if we get up the nerve to criticize them as false and harmful, then we will succeed in assuring that the immense aid poured over the peoples living in poverty will not be siphoned off or dissipated, and that the progress so yearned for will finally bless the millions of poor people who are the shame of the world.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Marcos Aguinis". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized 'A' and a horizontal line underlining the name.

Argentine writer **Marcos Aguinis** was born in Cordoba in 1935 and is a medical doctor. His first book appeared in 1963, and since then he has published novels, essays, short stories, and biographies that have been enthusiastically received and also generated controversy. He has written for newspapers and magazines in Latin America, the United States, and Europe. He has delivered lectures and given courses in educational, artistic, scientific, and political institutions in Germany, Spain, the United States, France, Israel, Russia, Italy, and almost all Latin American countries.

When democracy was restored in Argentina in 1983, he was named Minister of Culture, and he created the National Program for the Democratization of Culture, which was supported by the United Nations. He also initiated intensive action to improve the participatory mechanisms of society.

Aguinis was awarded the Planeta Prize in Spain and was made a *Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres* by France. In 1995, Argentores, the Argentine Society of Writers, awarded him the Grand Prize of Honor for his work as a whole.

His novels include *Refugiados, crónica de un palestino* (1969), *La cruz invertida* (1970), *Cantata de los diablos* (1972), *La conspiración de los idiotas* (1978), *Profanación del amor* (1989), *La gesta del marrano* (1991), *La matriz del infierno* (1997), *Los iluminados* (1999) and *Asalto al paraíso* (2003).

Among his more influential essays are “Argentina, un país de novela” (1989) “Elogio de la culpa” (1992) and “El atroz encanto de ser argentinos” (2001).

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THE DIFFICULTY OF TELLING THE TRUTH

Darío Ruiz Gómez

The Different Ways of Telling the Truth

For Bertolt Brecht, the difficulty of telling the truth was a problem of strategy in the face of a totalitarian system like Nazism. That was when he wrote his celebrated essay “Ten Ways to Tell the Truth in Times of Oppression.” As a militant of the communist cause, the truth was an issue tied to the necessity of denouncing not only Nazi violence, but also denouncing the poverty and misery in which the German proletariat was living. For Brecht, the truth was a revolutionary necessity. When Europe and Berlin were divided at the end of the war, Brecht remained in East Germany, where he enjoyed Party privileges, and established his own theatre company, the “Berliner Ensemble,” with official support from the regime. The oppressive East German regime was characterized by purges, executions, and absolute intolerance toward other ways of thinking. Brecht, how-

ever, never spoke out against it. Instead, he remained silent, casting a shadow over his great works.

Or perhaps the truth, at that stage, was no longer a necessity or, paradoxically, it was for the use of political enemies of the communist regime. The political dimension of this truth is also evident in Latin America, where the leftist *intelligentsia* has, since the early 20th century, voiced its condemnation in novels, poems and dramas inspired by the irrepressible desire to change history through revolution, to rip Latin America from the jaws of imperialism. This path, however, has not always led to the reign of truth, precisely because of the pitfall that lies between the blind faith in the utopia of a social revolution and the intellectual loss of objectivity vis-à-vis the inevitable political committees for whom intellectuals will never cease to be subjects of suspicion.

Why, then, tell the truth or seek the truth? Why oppose the censorship of the regime in power and denounce the absence

of democratic freedoms? The trap into which many European intellectuals fell in the service of such a cause, with the argument that “history cannot be stopped,” and “history is irreversible,” has been repeated over and over in every Latin American country. And the immediate consequence of this error can be seen in the cultural absurdities into which they drifted, in the travesties of “revolutionary trials” which ended up in action for action’s sake, and in banditry.

The Imposition of a Folkloric Identity

The critical conscience of any individual, whether an intellectual or an ordinary citizen, demands, as the State’s implicit duty, that he or she be told the truth about events that define the course of the society of which he or she is a part. This represents the spiritual heritage of the Enlightenment, which was implanted in Latin America by distinguished figures such as Simón Rodríguez, Andrés Bello, José Martí and Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, heirs to the legacy of Montesquieu, Voltaire and, above all, Rousseau; they started the tradition of a political philosophy in which society is viewed from a universal perspective, cemented in the principles of equality, fraternity and, above of all, liberty. The conscience of these founders was not rooted in what we today almost always demagogically call “identity,” but rather in the imperative necessity to emerge from the dark night of religious and racial prejudices and, above all, from the terrible atavism that played a key role throughout the 19th century; they

wanted to establish a true democracy based on universal principles of civility. I want to mention this power of philosophy against barbarism because, up until now, Latin American history has been constantly characterized by a chronic return to a telluric degradation, and an ancestral hatred of culture. The will to destroy these civilizing principles in the name of a hypothetical “identity” is based solely on regression to a supposed pre-Columbian past, with the imposition of folklore as the sole argument for this identity—telluric myth over reason.

In Colombia, the civilizing past, the history of the use of reason against the irrationality of atavism was systematically erased from the educational system in the name of the “revolution,” in order to enthrone a folkloric and simplistic Latin Americanism, ignorant of the rest of the world, as our sole cultural heritage. The clear political objective was to isolate ourselves from Western tradition, to eliminate the universal principles of justice, and the rationalist ideals that must govern the relationships within a society. To present the legacy of Western civilization as an example of “cultural imperialism” that must be eradicated in the name of our “native identity” is not only monstrous, but also lays bare the intentions of those who are proposing, as an alternative, that we return to millennial tribal laws. The juridical idea of “citizen” has been erased as a political concept and as a necessary and fundamental concept of ethics. Where does that leave notions such as ethics and morals if the right to be individuals is denied? On the same day

that some leftist intellectuals defended Bin Laden, FARC murdered an elderly indigenous leader whom the UN had declared a universal sage. Remaining silent about this crime thus became a lesson in contemporary political strategy, since telling the truth would have presupposed, in this case, reflection, self-criticism and, of course, condemnation of the crime.

Chronicle of a Heralded Loneliness

What García Márquez calls “the loneliness of Latin America” is therefore nothing other than the strategic return to an infantile mentality that not only isolates us from the rest of the world, but also exempts us from the intellectual responsibility of resisting the temptations of barbarity, superstition and prejudice. Above all, it exempts us from the necessary capacity for self-criticism in the sense and scope given to this concept by Marx: to weigh what has theoretically been done, what has been put into practice, in order to recognize, with sufficient nobility of soul and due analytical rigor, the errors committed.

Not to proceed in this way means allowing error to calcify in public opinion, as in the case of Colombia that established a possible political justification for guerrilla warfare four decades ago. Today, however, this is a criminal gang which, during President Pastrana’s four-year term alone, murdered nearly 20,000 Colombians while “peace commissions” were meeting. What was the reaction of intellectuals in the face of these acts of barbarity? They avoided critical reflection and substituted a strategy

of emotionalism, in which sentimentality and vague arguments in defense of identity diminished the moral scope of the deeds. Andrés Bello and Simón Rodríguez have been replaced by the officially sanctioned writers of revolution. Villalobos, Chávez and Ginastera have been replaced by the singers of regional “protest” songs. The political use of manipulated folklore, as Camus recalls, has one objective: to keep the citizen in a state of premodern innocence—which indeed Salazar, Franco, and Stalin all did. Frozen in time, this new patriot is then alien to the mechanisms that make and determine his history; he is distracted by the factitious nostalgia of caudillism, the strategic use of the uniform and the popular march.

What truth are we talking about? In one accommodating version, the rural ways of life are imposed as redemptive paradigms in the face of the complexity of urban life, where silent social and cultural processes have been producing radical revolutions on the fringe of the political model of revolution: the autonomies of women, ethnic minorities and sexual groups. This means not telling the truth, as a strategy, by seeking to freeze the social image at an invented time, to achieve certain political effects. By rejecting the challenge of a changing reality that penetrates its complexity, the regressive mentality seeks to maintain culture and politics within a one-dimensional view. This does in fact mean accepting that one is incapable of facing an overwhelming bombardment of indiscriminate information because—as the Colombian scholar Rafael Gutiérrez

Girardot astutely remarked— inasmuch as the great themes of culture are, supposedly, the prerogative of European culture due to its greater age, we Latin Americans are reduced to folklore. Except that Borges, Alfonso Reyes, Macedonio, Guimarães Rosa, Felisberto, Vallejo, Neruda, Octavio Paz, and Onetti all asserted themselves in the universal, having transcended the local, thus uncovering a new identity under the same historic circumstances.

The Industrialization of Folklore

Within this methodology characterized by demagoguery, fiction was reduced to “magical realism” or “testimony,” cinematography regressed to the political pamphlet, and poetry was used for proselytizing; and logically, the inconvenient philosopher was replaced by the political strategist. The problem of truth did not matter at all, inasmuch as knowledge, as a process toward that truth, had been categorically eliminated. To know is to unveil, to know is to move beyond the party line, until wandering off the beaten path which leads to true knowledge. Curiously, what happened here — I repeat — what the far right did in countries such as Spain and Portugal under their dictatorships, was to freeze the culture and regress to what they considered the goodness of folklore, thus seeking to maintain the citizenry in a sort of perpetual infancy.

This gave rise to a singular paradox: industrialized folklore sells, and it sells very well. When political problems are converted into mock folklore, it reduces the search for social equity and the investigation into

corruption. It relies on the stale formula of popular revolt as the destiny of populations who are supposedly incapable of assuming the risks and moral challenges that accompany political maturity. The greatest challenge on the road to maturity still remains the building of democracy. Will barbarity, then, be the only constant in Latin America? Did the Cuban Revolution mean going deep into history’s premises, according to Lenin, or did it constitute an abrupt return to the image of stereotypical Latin America? “Postmodern guerrilla” was the term Gabriel Zaid used, with subtle humor, to describe the Zapatista guerrilla in Chiapas, in order to show what I believe has been highlighted: regression to a fictitious past, to history already lived, converted into allegory for the use of the middle classes who, in this way, sublimate their historic revolutionary frustration. There is therefore a deliberate purpose in this manipulation of the political, of the use of magic over reason: the deliberate purpose of not telling the truth.

The fact is that telling the truth would mean undertaking a moral task of enormous responsibility toward the victimized innocents: reparations and begging forgiveness for having remained silent. To be leftist, for example, no longer constitutes a moral position against exploitation of the weak, since (as in Colombia) those who claimed to speak for the weak are now in fact the ones persecuting and killing them. The intellectuals who support Chávez in his “Bolivarian Revolution” have forgotten the critical conscience that would have allowed them to differentiate between the

need for social justice, or the right of the oppressed to education. Populism goads the poor into giving collective answers that ultimately imprison them under the official party line, instead of involving them as fully participating citizens in a democracy. To hide and take cover behind the rhetoric of a political discourse means to escape personal responsibility for critical thinking with regard to the everyday dilemmas of reality.

Regression to Intolerance

Regression carries with it, hidden in its roots, the path to intolerance and totalitarianism. In Colombia, on the Indian reservations, we have seen a return to flogging as a typical tribal punishment. We have regressed from the move toward a social contract (which presupposes the freedom to decide for oneself) to tribal status. It is no wonder that certain leftist politicians have supported Bin Laden's fundamentalism based on his "right to be different" and have even defended Saddam Hussein under the same reasoning.

I have already mentioned another key word, namely, *postmodernism*. In Latin America modernism has only crystallized in the direction of certain technologies, large urban centers and superhighways, but it has never been accompanied by the appropriate and necessary moral development needed to legitimize these technological achievements. Thus, how can we speak of "postmodernity"? In the 1970s, Latin America nonetheless fully embraced what Marcuse called "consumerist capitalism,"

and the proliferation of objects characteristic of metropolitan technology became inevitable, both in the family space and in what we call the "consumption and barter environment," the city coexisting with rural backwardness.

The impossibility of refusing the invasive objects of the modern world leads to the aesthetic proposal of a hybrid culture, a "bricolage," or juxtaposition of genres; but a hand-made basket is not art, it's a craft. The process of creative *techné*, as the definer of shapes and symbols, has been supplanted by something that is deliberately called "craftsmanship." We keep selling the image of a farmer who no longer exists because the Internet and television have endowed him with the right to avail himself of other cultural patterns; but the phenomenon has a much deeper impact. I should mention here what Emilio Lledó says in his prologue to *La herencia de Europa* by Gadamer: "Creating objects, flooding the natural environment with the products of a tidal wave of new 'realities,' entails, among other things, forgetting a tradition in which this excessive capacity to produce was absolutely unknown. Because the fundamental problem with this creative insolence (*hubris*) is not so much that it facilitates forms of dominion, control and shaping of nature, but that by seeking to dominate and substitute it, it succeeds in triggering an unstoppable process of annihilation."

The products of the marketplace have intruded and are determining new meanings, new adaptations, to the point of assimilating what seemed impossible to assimilate and transform. The figure of the

sleeping Indian that Rómulo Rozo created as a stereotype of poverty and laziness has already lost validity; the Robert Rodríguez movies are stereotypes of stereotypes, postcard landscapes, scenes that are parodies of other ancestral scenes. Are we speaking of extraterritoriality in the sense given to this term by George Steiner, or are we referring to a supposedly “global” cinematography, fiction, art? The case of Cortázar writing about his life in Paris is different from the case of Mexican writers like Jorge Volpi and Ignacio Padilla, who write novels on the Nazi era and believe they have secured the right to appropriate narratives that are not their own. In an important book, *The World Republic of Letters*, Pascale Casanova describes, without dangerous ideological simplisms, and from the inner core of every literary creative process, the gratuitous impostures (and of course, falsifications) to which marketing-imposed models have led; for example, an Indian novelist writing great family sagas of great historical events in the manner of Thomas Hardy, Dickens or Tolstoy.

The Laboratories of the New Identity

As a point of reference, the Latin American soap opera (*telenovela*) industry is symptomatic of the abrupt changes in the narrative elements and sentimentality used to illustrate concepts of love, betrayal, friendship, goodness and wickedness, not only in a setting of modest poverty or in a middle-class environment, but also in the very center of the vortex of the new economies. The internationalization of *telenovela* stories has

also led to the internationalization of customs that, like those of the Mexican horsemen (*charros*), once showed a resolute and obstinate regionalism; now these customs have been adapted to fit into any reality.

This is “cultural mimicry,” as it was called a few decades ago to refer to the act of replicating metropolitan models. These are the effects brought upon us by rampant globalization, which the so-called “new social élites” proclaim in various publications; we can read about their gastronomic tastes, the fashion they wear, the architecture they boast, and the *savoir-vivre* they exhibit as a mark of distinction. What is this opacity in history that prevents us from unveiling the face of primal reality? What writer has ventured to unveil what is hidden behind the facade of these architectures, these new centers of power, cities that gleam with postmodernism, where the brazenness of insubstantial semblance is elevated to the category of “progress,” while on our outskirts a type of African warfare roams freely? Indeed Miami, New York, and Madrid are the new centers of a territoriality that has expanded thanks to immigrants; they are meeting places that have become gigantic laboratories of a new identity.

The literature industry has produced a type of writer whose only mission is periodically feeding the market. Thus, as is clear in Spain, the role of the critic and criticism, the role of the intellectual with respect to the society in which he or she lives, has been dramatically disappearing from the media, replaced by mere manufacturers of news items on the product to be sold. For what or for whom, then, does

a writer write? To inquire into the loneliness of man, to grasp the distress of those who are being persecuted, or to satisfy the false models imposed by marketing? Must we suppose, then, in the face of the crisis of the left and its loss of credibility, that any critical attitude toward social injustice and corruption has disappeared? Here we should mention the role of the so-called “information media,” that substitutes history with current events. Due to the most inconsiderate bombardment of news, the media has eliminated the need for critical reflection. “The Gulf War never happened,” stated Jean Baudrillard, to demonstrate that the disappearance of true information leads to this sad conclusion: the Gulf War never happened, just as the terrible war in Colombia is still not happening in mankind’s moral conscience.

The term “the establishment” no longer has (I want to emphasize) the same connotation it used to have in the 1960s, since what we call “the political establishment” has undergone significant and radical changes over the subsequent decades. What is the meaning of patriotic values now? What is the scope of the so-called “State presence” in the face of situations such as those posed by guerrilla warfare and narcotrafficking? The Argentinean misery and the Argentinean poor do not correspond today to those conditions suffered in the first decades of the 20th Century. There is a radical difference between the conditions of poverty described by Oscar Lewis in his *Children of Sanchez*, and the poor of today who are under the system of so-called “economic integration” with the United States. The

same thing is happening with the Brazilian poor, and the poor of Ecuador, Bolivia, Venezuela, the Caribbean, etc. Fifty years ago poverty had religious and political support that enabled it to generate resistance values, and the underground acquired an intense aesthetic clarity.

The Substitution of Reality

For four years we Colombians lived without being able to leave our cities, sometimes not even our neighborhoods, because the war had made it impossible to travel by road, because we no longer had municipalities or regions due to assaults, kidnappings, and the gunning down of innocent travelers. For the youth of this generation, their relationship with the country’s culture virtually disappeared. Isolated in every home, these youths were forever marked, by being denied the continuity with necessary traditions, definitive images and metaphors for carrying out a language task, or a new political task that would enable them to leave the interregnum in which they live. Finally, it was enough that Colombians could once again travel freely by road and in the mountains for an important change to begin to take place with respect to concepts like nature and landscape, and meeting with the others in a true diversity. As a result of this cultural and political confrontation, in-depth questioning started to arise regarding the meaning of these forms. People began searching for a new set of roots that may appropriate the words, the music, the spaces of another society; they have sought beyond the political models,

and messianism that brought not peace but war, and the destruction of the most profound human values.

Is it true, as Jean-François Lyotard has said, that we are witnessing the last of the grand narratives? Nazism and communism have disappeared, but have Christianity, Buddhism, and Islam disappeared with their explanations for the world, and man's relationship with the sacred? Political systems and economic theories applied abstractly almost always end up leading society to the worst of desacralized utopias, in the name of technological prophecies, including what has been called "democratic fundamentalism." The retreat from the ideals of fraternity, equality and liberty enshrined by the great Western philosophical tradition has been manifest and painful, as evidenced by the fratricidal war in the Balkans, and the horror of the Colombian war with its thousands of massacred civilians every year, and no one seeming to notice it; on the other hand, narcotrafficking, by using clever disguises, progresses every day toward what would be a monstrous institutionalization of the most deprived of despotisms.

The Culture of Simulacrum

Given that what we today call a "utopia" has become scientific, relieved of genuine ideals, and deprived of the promise of its meaning; it has also become an established euphemism as the preferred method for political leaders to escape the responsibilities of transforming the infinite plurality of the world. What difference, quantitatively and qualitatively, can be made be-

tween the concept of the citizen as critical thinker and that of today's passive consumer whose negative impact on social life leads to catastrophic alienation? As a consequence of this, what was a cultural and social tradition tends to disappear, while information, rather than common memory, is added to current urban realities. Urban centers and exclusive neighborhoods prepare themselves, under accelerated market laws, for what Vicente Verdú has pointedly called "fiction capitalism." Shopping centers have become citadels in which the user is removed from the harsh reality of the streets so that he or she may enjoy replicas of New York or Parisian urban scenes: hence, the culture of simulacrum.

What vision do they have of the world and of life, these large groups of Ecuadorian, Peruvian, Colombian and Central American immigrants, now added to the Argentinean, Uruguayan and Brazilian immigrants? What we call "chicano literature" is an invented product whose ideological objectives point to a reduction of everything Latin American to folklore. However, artists of Latin American origin incorporated into these societies have yet to define their struggle, which will only happen when they become capable of overcoming these clichés, when they take upon themselves the responsibility of bearing the true traditions of civilizing philosophy; that is to say, the complexities implied by true knowledge in the path against Manichaeism and the manipulation of truth. Does the universal Latin American exist today?

In any case, we cannot continue to re-

fer to fragmented truths, accommodated to the interests of false regionalisms, that constitute abysses artificially created to subjugate us. We have seen the human element disappearing into the horizon of the daily grind in which the emotional, the sentimental, and the fraternal are the virtues that inspire respect for differences. These are virtues that include and do not exclude, and it is precisely by these virtues that speech is born and set free; speech creates bridges over these abysses, because it does not impose, but rather demands an exchange of words, and the premise of achieved freedom of expression.

Gregorio Marañón says that, without daring to admit it, we carry within ourselves the grand but dead illusions of our fathers. This startling assertion serves to measure not only the extent of the responsibility we have avoided, in trying to hide from ourselves behind these false utopias, but also the scope of the moral catastrophe that it presupposes — for politics, art, and philosophy — having replaced the virtues of living in a society, with a moral code born and refined during the exercise of daily life, with loyalties to prophecies and supposedly historical claims by which we have actually despoiled the best of ourselves.

Illusion is not a problem of theoretical rigor but one of moral imagination, to sketch the impossible that hides behind the dream of emancipation from the darkness inherent in any form of totalitarianism. In the face of any political irrationality, there is a permanent yearning for and demanding of freedom so as to recover the lost order of night and day. “The destruction

of an illusion,” recalls Nietzsche, “does not produce truth, but rather more ignorance.” An illiterate person is one who cannot read or write but who lives at the bottom of a society with the illiterate literate, that is to say, an individual who can read and write but has lost the roots of his culture. Unfortunately the art, fiction, journalism, and politics of the latter proliferate, and so our task consists of rescuing the ability to listen. But to whom should we listen? Which are the voices that we should not listen to? Has the proliferation of false voices made us deaf?

The frightening diagnosis of Lévi-Strauss that Latin American cities go from infancy to decrepitude, without having known the advantages of maturity and the sweetness of decadence, lamentably still holds true, and illustrates the sort of paradox that I have attempted to describe: the deformed vision of Latin America as seen from the distorted mirror of our particular realities, that convert Latin America for the world into a tourist image in which guerrilla violence and narcotrafficking now blend into the old local color.

The Fundamental Role of Culture

I believe that today, more than ever, the role of culture as a critic of customs and creator of new opportunities for dialogue is crucial. These are times when political polarization leads to blind fundamentalism due to lack of rationality and, on the other hand, under the devastating action of marketing, we witness the death of speech, a disappearance of the will to create forms,

and an absence of critical perspectives. So what is the mission of the individual who writes, of the individual who molds new plastic forms, of the individual who goes to meet a new citizen in order to lay down the principles for a new society?

When the political and academic establishments and the cultural media have pulled away from the overall society, have turned their backs on reality, we generally fall into what we call tautology—this represents the death of philosophy, an avoidance of the oxygenating task of questioning, the task of common doubting. In Ray Bradbury's novel *Fahrenheit 451* there is one scene that I always remember when the little girl, surrounded in her house by giant TV screens the size of walls, decides to do something forbidden; she opens the door and finds herself in the starry night, in the living presence of trees and the scent of the gardens. From that time on, she will no longer be able to live in the artificial reality in which she had been completely unaware of the importance of books.

What is there beyond the false walls of digital reality in Colombia? There is a real country that, overcoming the scourge of war, and the opprobrium of massacres, continues to build its reality. We live daily with the degradation of the concept of human rights because the nation is polarized in favor of one warlord or the other; the mediating role of philosophy has disappeared and its space is being occupied by "opinion makers" whose strategy consists in denouncing the massacres of their opponents while remaining silent about those of their allies.

To shake off intellectual laziness and the convenience of continuing to live off clichés, and to place oneself in the cross-fire, thus asserting the need for freedom in order to exact justice for the horror, does not seem a proposal that is going to get an enthusiastic reception in any circle. This still could not be considered "moral indifference," since precisely those values that defined what we call "civility" were the first things swept aside to justify the excesses, so that ethics and codes of honor became empty words. The incessant recurrence of massacres and their transformation in the public's opinion into simple anecdotes of things that happened far away have consummated the task of anesthetizing consciences. So then who is interested in the truth? Fortunately or unfortunately, I belong to a generation that questions, makes inquiries, and does not accept the resplendent avenues of utopia, but rather faces the task of constructing what is human based on a fragmented world. It is from these contradictions and vacillations, but also from these sympathies for those whom history has caused to suffer, that my writing is born and inspired.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Darío Ruiz Gómez". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a period at the end.

Darío Ruiz Gómez (Anorí, Colombia, 1936) studied in Spain where he graduated from the Madrid School of Journalism (*Escuela Oficial de Periodismo*) and also pursued studies in urban development and aesthetics. In 1961, he began his career as an art and literary critic at the magazine *Acento* in Madrid. In 1966 he became a professor at the School of Architecture of the National University in Medellín where he taught history and theory until his retirement. He has, however, continued to work as a critic as well as a researcher of regional and international architecture and urban development. He has published collections of short stories entitled *Para que no se olvide su nombre* (1967), *La ternura que tengo para vos* (1974), *Para decirle adiós a mamá* (1985), *En tierra de paganos* (1991) and *Sobra de rosa y vino* (1999). In addition to his novel, *Hojas en el patio* and various books of literary and architectural criticism, he has also published works of poetry entitled *Señales en el techo de la casa* (1974), *Geografía* (1978), *A la sombra del ángel* (1990) and *La muchacha de la leyenda* (2000). His poems and short stories have been translated into English, French, and Arabic.

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