

〈講演〉

AUTHORITARIANISM IN LATIN AMERICA: IS POLITICAL CULTURE RESPONSIBLE?

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I am very pleased and honored to be here among you today to make the acquaintance with those whom I have met before and to see what a fine and vigorous organization you have here.

What I would like to talk about today is the political authoritarianism in Latin America and the question of whether this is due to cultural factor or political culture. As everyone knows, the countries of Latin America have hardly been models of democratic practice. The region has, since independence, been stereotyped as the land of revolutions, military seizures of power, and brutal dictatorships. Explanations for why this should be so have been various, but one of those most frequently offered is that Latin American authoritarianism derives from an authoritarian intellectual tradition and political culture, or set of attitudes affecting political behavior, bequeathed to the region by Spain, the dominant colonial power. This cultural approach is probably the one being most widely taught to students of Latin American politics today.

What are we to make of this argument? Was the Spanish colonial heritage distinctively authoritarian, in contrast, for example, to the

Anglo-Saxon tradition, and is that the reason for the authoritarianism characteristic of Latin American political practice? According to one recent textbook

A widely discussed determinant of Latin American political culture is the colonial heritage, manifested in the attitudes of the Latin American people toward both the decision making role of government and their participation in it. The strong tendency toward personalism and authoritarianism in political culture is well known.... Political participation in the decision making process means very little to average Latin Americans.¹

A new edition of one of the most frequently adopted textbooks in Latin American politics states the case more cautiously:

It is probably safe to say that while North American political culture is strongly Lockean and liberal, that of Latin America, historically at least, is strongly elitist, hierarchical, authoritarian, corporatist, and patrimonialist. The elitism of Latin American society stems from the Iberian tradition.... Elitism, hierarchy, and authoritarianism all had a powerful basis in traditional Spanish Catholicism...²

Other statements of the position are cruder. But the case they make is the same: Latin America's lack of democracy is said to be largely due to a cultural heritage from Spain opposed to democratic values, a heritage that was authoritarian, militarist, and Catholic. The Catholic Church was itself based on authoritarian and hierarchical principles, which it promoted, in this view, as it promoted intolerance of other viewpoints and beliefs. The characteristics ascribed to the Iberian traditions are usually contrasted, implicitly if not explicitly, with those of a presumed Anglo-Saxon tradition embodied in British and Amer-

ican practice.

This view, then, contains three factual assertions:1) That Hispanic political culture during the colonial period was particularly authoritarian, e. g. as contrasted with Anglo-Saxon political culture;2) as a result of this, political attitudes in Latin America today and in the recent past have also been particularly authoritarian and hostile to democratic values;and 3) authoritarian practice is a result of these attitudes.

I wish to argue here that all of these assertions are false. Let us examine them one by one.

I. Was the Hispanic Culture of the Colonial Period Particularly Authoritarian?

During the colonial period Spain was indeed authoritarian and Spanish religion was on the whole intolerant, notwithstanding the examples of enlightened preaching and saintly conduct of priests such as Las Casas and Montesinos. Yet this was, it should be remembered, the period of the Protestant Reformation and the Catholic Counter-Reformation, during which there was intolerance and persecution on all sides. In other words, the Spanish were authoritarian—but so was everyone else at that time. What country in Europe, or anywhere else, was democratic in the sixteenth century? What we are talking about here when we refer to authoritarianism is thus not a *Volksgeist*, a particular characteristic of the Hispanic spirit, but rather a *Zeitgeist*, a mood that characterized a particular historical period. To compare the English experience, for example:the horrors inflicted by Henry VIII on those of his subjects who refused to join him in his break from Rome were as terrible as those of the Catholic Inquisition—although less egalitarian:peers of the realm were legally exempt from torture during judicial investigation.³ It is likely that Henry had more people killed

for religious nonconformity during his reign alone than did the Spanish Inquisition, terrible as it was, during its entire existence.

As far as attitudes and culture are concerned, one leading study has concluded that during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries English families were authoritarian, their upbringing of children creating a proneness to violence,⁴ while another reports that the educated elite in England knew no politics beyond what students of Latin America would call *caudillismo*: they "could not give themselves fully to any ideology or institution: ideas and governments were no longer as important as the lives of great men who used the theater of state and society for the fulfillment of their personal destinies."⁵

As far as authoritarianism, proneness to violence, and unprincipled opportunism in politics are concerned, it is difficult to make a case that these characterized Spaniards more than Anglo-Saxons or anyone else of the same period. Since one author has cited the leading Spanish political philosopher, Francisco Suarez, as evidence of the dominance of authoritarian political thought in Spain⁶, it is worth pointing out that James I of England ordered the public hangman to burn a treatise by Suarez because it was subversive of royal authority.

II. Are Attitudes in Latin America Pro-Authoritarian Today?

The case for a distinctively authoritarian colonial Hispanic culture, one more authoritarian than of other countries which have since evolved in a democratic direction, seems then not to be conclusive. The colonial heritage was no doubt authoritarian; but the attitudes of countries that were then equally authoritarian, like Britain and France, seem not to have caused authoritarian systems to persist in those countries to the present time. Have attitudes in Hispanic America then

remained anti-democratic, defying the general evolution of humanity's attitudes in a pro-democratic direction? No, not according to what evidence we have. What do the empirical research results show?

"Urban Mexicans of both middle-class and working-class status demonstrated strong support for democratic liberties," and "we have failed to uncover evidence of majority support for anti-democratic political attitudes in urban Mexico."⁷ "These results show no evidence of an authoritarian culture among Chilean or Argentine workers."⁸ Among Panamanian high school students "there is a relatively strong belief that political democracy is desirable and that national elections are meaningful."⁹ "One of the Argentine paradoxes is the fact that while representative democracy does not function... its ideology is dominant in the population."¹⁰

Thus it seems that the second hypothesis also falls to the ground. Hispanic attitudes in the sixteenth century were authoritarian—but so were they everywhere. Democratic values and attitudes are now widespread outside Latin America—but they are dominant within Latin America too.

III. Is Authoritarian Practice Due to Attitudes and Culture?

If authoritarian practice were due to elements in the Hispanic cultural tradition, then the Latin American countries that were more Hispanic would be more authoritarian. In fact, exactly the reverse is true. The least democratic countries in Latin America, as measured, for example, by the frequency of military seizures of power over the century and a half since Independence, or by the persistence of long-lived dictatorships, have not been those which partook to a greater degree in the Spanish tradition, but precisely the countries where the

Hispanic proportion of the population was at its lowest, that is, the countries with the largest Indian populations—Bolivia, Guatemala, Peru, Ecuador, Mexico, and El Salvador; and the countries with the largest Afro-American populations, Haiti and the Dominican Republic.¹¹

Of course, it would be nonsensical to draw racist conclusions from this fact. The point is rather that societies with large concentrations of Indians or blacks were societies with large exploited populations in which social conditions were highly unequal. Social inequality, in other words, grew out of environmental circumstances that led to an economy based on unfree labor. Of course, the same was true in the United States. Participation in the Anglo-Saxon cultural tradition did not bring social equality and democratic politics to antebellum Mississippi or South Carolina. In such unequal societies any movement in the direction of political democracy was unthinkable. If a share of political power was accorded to those at the lower end of the social spectrum, they would necessarily use it so as to change the harsh conditions under which they lived. This is after all no more than a corollary of Aristotle's fundamental dictum, that the distribution of power tends to follow the distribution of property, and vice versa. A redistribution of power would be likely to result in a redistribution of property.

Those in positions of political power cooperated with those who ruled the economy, if they were not indeed the same people. They could not tolerate any movement in the direction of democracy, because that would pose the possibility of a redistribution of property and income to the advantage of the impoverished majority of the population.

Here, surely, lies the true reason for Latin American authoritarianism. It reflects, not the attitudes of the many, but the interests of the

few; it reflects social and economic structure, and not political culture.

This should occasion no surprise. Authoritarian governments, by contrast with democracies, are after all precisely those that are not controlled by their subjects' opinions; why should they be thought to reflect their subjects' attitudes? Indeed, to allege that they do, to tell people groaning under the abuses of an arbitrary regime that it represents their own values and beliefs, is to add patronizing insult to an injury that should be condemned and not condoned, however indirectly.

IV. Summary and Conclusion.

Let me summarize the argument with respect to political culture, since it is easy to misunderstand. Different national cultures of course exist, and differing attitudes and beliefs. These may give a distinctive tone, or style, to political behavior. However, there are several very substantial difficulties in relying on cultural factors to provide the main burden of explanation of the principal features of political systems, as follows:

1. Political attitudes and values are often clearly the *dependent* variable in relation to the character of the political system. Regimes seek to indoctrinate people with the appropriate values, but in any case appropriate value change occurs independently. The evolution of West German political culture since the end of World War II is a striking example.
2. As the German example shows, regime type changes due to exogenous factors such as defeat in war. Political culture adjusts to this as best it can.
3. Where such factors are not present, regime type tends to evolve as circumstances change, so that political systems at any given

moment in history are a different set from those of previous eras. To this extent, *Zeitgeist* dominates *Volkegeist*.

4. The processes by which popular attitudes and values can influence regime type remain obscure, since rulers are of course not necessarily typical products of the culture. This point has particular force if it is a question of explaining authoritarian regimes, which by definition are least likely to pay attention to subjects' preferences, or to be controlled by their values and attitudes.
5. The intimate connections between economic and political power mean that, as a minimum, regime type must not be such as to make impossible the continuation of the premises on which the economy is based. How could Salvadorean landowners be expected to tolerate genuine democracy?

What this means is that the burden of proof has to fall on any proposed cultural explanations. Allegations that attitudes are of a certain kind should be supported, for example, by survey research data, and not by vague intuitions. Especially, nebulous cultural arguments should not be advanced to explain behavior which can be shown to reflect rational pursuit of interest.¹² The prevalence of authoritarian regimes in Latin America, in particular, should not be ascribed to the "Hispanic cultural tradition."

[Questions and Answers]

Q:I would like to ask question concerning the validity of knowledge on regional characteristics, for example, what is the meaning of political culture in understanding Latin Ameican politics?

Needler:Sure. We know that national cultures are different. We would

expect that in various situations an Englishman, or a Frenchman or a Japanese to act differently. There is an infinity of jokes made to it. There are cultural differences in styles. Now, do these cultural differences determine different political systems? Or do they determine other matters of behavior? For example, Germany and Japan today are states of democracy. Sixty years ago, they had different political systems. Was the change due to a change in political culture? I would say, it was due to changes in world politics, acts of fortunes of war, that is, the defeat. I would think that what determines political systems are various historical factors, sometimes, stage of development, major economic changes, advances in education, wars, conquests, imperialism, decolonization. Very often, culture continues from one stage to another, although it modifies itself slightly. So, it is a very difficult concept to handle scientifically. It hasn't been done successfully. We know that there is something there. We know that there are different national attitudes and behaviors.

I would say two things about this paper. First, I don't think cultural questions normally determine political systems. Second, authoritarianism is less determined by political culture than democratic systems, because authoritarianism takes people's attitudes into account much less than other systems. That is the nature of authoritarianism, precisely to ignore people's attitude and to impose rules regardless of what people think. I don't mean to say that there is nothing at all to the study of national cultures, but it should be done scientifically. The real problem is that, because it is a vague concept, it is very easy for lazy people (we are all lazy at some points) to say why such and such happens in England, for example. They would say, "Well, that's just how the English are. They like it." For example, why do they have the

two party system in England? Those of us, political scientists would say that it is because of a certain electoral system. They have a single member district which discourages a third or fourth party, because they don't get any votes. It is a rational behavior based on certain structural type. Political culture people would say, "Well, the English are very fond of games, sports, of soccer and cricket. And in all these games there are always two teams. The British look on politics like sports, so there should always be two parties." You may think I am joking. I am not. There are political culture explanation that say that. It may be true or may not. There is no way of testing it. But, it doesn't make sense to political science people. To be a scientist, what we should look at first is: "Can you explain behavior on the basis of logical, rational pursuit of interests? If you can explain something, you have explained it. That's all. You don't need to invent a cultural explanation. If you can't explain something, maybe you need to go to cultural explanation. What you need to do is to make an attitude survey. You should hire a bunch of graduates students in sociology to send questionnaires to ask what people really want. You don't sit back and think on logics. That is irresponsible and lazy. There may be something in cultural explanations, but they need to be handled as a residual category, and only if some other logical explanation doesn't work.

Q: Six years ago, authoritarianism was a popular concept and in a sense, it served as an apology for military governments. Today, many Latin American countries are in process of redemocratization. I would like to know about the contemporary atmosphere among the Latin Americanists in the United States. Does the fact that you make those assertions which I think are accepted by our colleagues today reflect

the general attitude in the United States toward authoritarianism?

Needler: I don't know what is dominant interpretation in Japan, but I would guess, though, that cultural explanation is rather stronger. There are fashions in interpretations like in ladies' cloths. Today everybody talks of corporatism, and another year everybody talks about dependency. A few years ago I wrote a book on political development, but nowadays nobody wants to hear about political development. There is nothing wrong about it, but people get bored. Fernando Cardoso gave a paper in a LASA meeting in which he said, "Let's not talk about dependency." Guillermo O'Donnell wrote a book on bureaucratic authoritarianism, and everybody started to talk about it. And in a way this cultural interpretation of Latin American politics is a fashion. Presumably it may disappear and may revive later. So, what is the point? why should the United States government object to Latin American dictators, when Latin Americans really like them? Maybe I feel guilty, because we argued so, when I was a student in International Relations. I think it is not only scientifically wrong, it is pernicious and harmful to teach cultural interpretations. And I think it needs to be directly refuted. It should be explicitly and openly confronted and refuted. I did publish a book last year with many of these arguments, because I thought something needed to be done.

Q: What should be the proper roles of area studies and disciplines in university education? What do you recommend as a teaching method for area studies? Do you teach only Latin American politics or do you teach discipline and refer to other areas, when you teach on Latin America?

Needler: It is a practical question, rather than a purely theoretical one. Ideally students should study everything, but there is a limit in the time they have. There are two different questions. One is the promotion of knowledge and the second is teaching. As far as the promotion and expansion of knowledge and scholarship is concerned, it can be only through intellectual interaction by publication and mutual criticism. An individual can't do many things; he can only deal with a limited topic, say, Bolivia in the 16th century, but putting it together it makes sense. It is a social product. So, of course, in that respect, it may well be that work of other regions are relevant. For example, let's take an example; military rule. When I started studying Latin America thirty years ago, Latin America was stereotyped as the region of military dictatorships. People then were writing on African nations which were just starting to be independent. Some people were talking, "Of course, in Africa there won't be any military dictatorships. That grows out of Hispanic tradition. Africa was mostly colonized by Britain and France which don't have that tradition. So, in terms of political culture, there won't be any military dictatorship." It is nonsense, because it is not political culture that does determine, but it will be the stage of development and so on. Of course, you can learn something from other areas, by comparing.

As far as training students is concerned, I think it depends on what level you are teaching at. I would say that undergraduate students should have very broad training. I don't think undergraduates should specialize. Of course, it depends on how good your highschool education is. In the United States highschool education is no good, so you

must teach undergraduates everything. On graduate levels, Latin America makes sense as a regional study, because it is different enough from other regions of the world, Africa or Asia. Latin America has something in common each other. Ideally, undergraduates should get general education. On graduate level, it is possible to specialize in areas. M. A. candidates could be area specialists, and doctoral candidates should specialize in intensive disciplines. It depends on what professional goals you have: general education or professional education.

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- 1 Russell H. Fitzgibbon and Julio A. Fernandez, *Latin America: Political Culture and Development*, (Prentice-Hall: Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 2nd Edition, 1981) pp. 4-5.
- 2 Howard J. Wiarda and Harvey F. Kline, eds., *Latin American Politics and Development*, 2nd. ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1985)
- 3 Jasper Ridley, *Henry VIII* (London: Constable, 1984) p. 24.
- 4 Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1977) pp. 216-218.
- 5 Norman Cantor, *The English: A History of Politics and Society to 1760*, cited in Naomi Bliven, "Henry the Bookman" (*The New Yorker*, February 3, 1986) p. 102.
- 6 Howard Wiarda, "Toward a Framework for the Study of Political Change in the Iberic-Latin Tradition," *World Politics*, January 1973. The misunderstanding here probably arose because the corporatist model, which was urged by Suarez, has become in our time a facade for an authoritarian alternative to democracy. To Suarez himself, however, it represented a traditional, more democratic alternative to the monarchical absolutism coming into vogue at the time he wrote.
- 7 John Booth and Mitchell Seligson, "The Political Culture of Authori-

- tarianism in Mexico: A Reexamination," *Latin American Research Review*, vol. XIX, no. 1, 1984, p. 118.
- 8 Susan Tiano, "Authoritarianism and Political Culture in Argentina and Chile in the Mid-1960s," *ibid.* vol. XIX, no. 1, 1986, p. 81.
 - 9 Daniel Goldrich, "Toward an Estimate of the Probability of Social Revolutions in Latin America," *Centennial Review*, Summer 1962, p. 405.
 - 10 Gino Germani, cited in *Hemispherica*, December 1966, p. 3.
 - 11 Peru averaged one extraconstitutional seizure of power every 3 years between Independence and the end of the nineteenth century, and the others mentioned were not far behind. See Warren Dean, "Latin American Golpes and Economic Fluctuations, 1823-1966," *Social Science Quarterly*, June 1970. Cuba and Panama were not independent states until early in the twentieth century, while Brazil did not become a republic until 1889.
 - 12 My favorite example: the two partyism of British politics has been said to be due to the British conceiving of politics as a game like soccer or cricket, in which only two teams can play. Of course the electoral system defeats third parties, and maintained in place by the two large parties precisely for that reason.