

## THE MORAL REPUBLIC IN THE EARLY NINETEENTH-CENTURY COLOMBIA

Franz D. Hensel Riveros

If the independence was a myth, an utopia, or a frustrated project was one of the questions that this number of *Anales* wanted to address. In this article, I want to suggest the independence was less a frustrated project or an unachievable utopia, and more a historical experience where central questions were raised: how to construct a political order? Which materials the actors would need to bring (and to bring back) to create it? What symbolic orders have to be considered to construct factual dominations and to create spaces of differentiated authority? In brief, how to produce and reproduce the political domination? I tackle these issues by highlighting one facet of this complex pos-colonial process: the key role of the moral concerns in the construction of the new political order. By doing this, I insist that we need to understand the texture of the political order in the nineteenth century since the anxieties, challenges, and ambiguities of its actors, rather than identify it as the epitome of the “political diseases” that seems to pervade our way to read Latin American nations throughout 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. In the first part of the text, I show the importance of the moral concerns in the construction of the republic. The second attempts to understand the republican project and its crossroads while the third section describes the moral order as a republican concern. Finally, the article concludes with a methodological suggestion: we need to historicize the political orders as cultural complexes and, thus, any attempt to understand them would represent an effort to establish the horizon of meaning in which they emerged.

## 1.

“In this book, I will recount the impressions and adventures of forty-six years in this moral century...” Thus, in 1881, José María Samper began writing what would later be the introduction to his autobiography *History of a Soul* (*Historia de una alma*). A moral century crossed by passion and turmoil, vacillation and contradiction. A century carved by souls whose story, like Samper’s, is one of momentary weaknesses, and one in which their reactionary efforts are defined as, “great battles, sustained by the pursuit for the truth, in the same way that their trials and tribulations were sustained by their impetuous pride and melancholic relief.” (Samper 1881:8). An intimate story of a soul, Samper would tell us, the soul of a child, youngster, adult, the soul of a son, brother, friend, citizen and thinker, who had not lived alone, but with “many other souls, great and small, good and bad”. It is a soul whose story many men share, and is “to some extent, the story of the Country [*patria*]” (Samper 1881:8).

Samper would tell us that this was a moral century and his contemporaries would not disagree with him; moral was also an important issue for them. José Félix Merizalde, doctor and professor of the recently founded (1826) Central University, also identified the role of moral in the restraint and routing of passion when he noted that passions such as cholera could be avoided “with a good education and healthy morals.” Similarly, Merizalde<sup>2</sup> commented that the evils of the “current era” were due to the sum of a bad childhood education and the “licentiousness of parents who transmit their weaknesses and vices to their offspring” (Merizalde 1828:479). Some years later, Mariano del Campo Larraondo<sup>3</sup>, set forward a similar proposal to Merizalde’s. In his

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<sup>2</sup> In its ‘free’ translation of Dr Estevan Tourtelle’s classic text *Epitome of the Hygienic Elements or of the Influence of Physical and Moral Things on Man*. (*Epítome de los elementos de higiene o de la influencia de las cosas físicas i morales sobre el hombre, i de los medios de conservar la salud*). Reprinted by J.A. Cualla in 1828. From here on cited as Merizalde, 1828.

<sup>3</sup> Priest and member of Popayán’s Primary Education Society in Popayan, Cauca, South of Colombia.

book, *Compendium of Christian Morality* (*Compendio de la moral cristiana*) (1835) he shows his “desire for children’s rapid and joyful educational progress” (del Campo 1835:1). He underlined that man should organize his life in an appropriate way; achievable only through awareness of the virtues lived by under God’s rule and of the vices that threaten such an existence.

For these authors it was necessary to instill an education that develops reason and raises moral standards early on. This education cultivates love for duty and forms “firm ideas on virtue” (Galavis 1842:35). With such an education, man will learn to love his obligations. He will also learn not only to direct himself correctly in his daily life but also when faced with difficult times. *Love duty, acquire virtue, and raise moral standards.*<sup>4</sup> These three principles delimit the central concern of the early republic, and its interest in securing a community of virtuous men: both those who govern and those who are governed. For the protagonists of this period (1821–1852), the securing of a republican political figure unavoidably passed for a kind of moral concern. Moral in such that the establishment of teaching and promotion of virtue, and the identification of and battle against vices is viewed as a priority. If I had to give a brief summary, I would have to borrow the words from a newspaper of that period: a “government whose motto is virtue” should make the effort to forge “good republicans” (*El Huerfanito* 1826 2:5).<sup>5</sup> The political community is built therefore on the

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<sup>4</sup> J.M. Galavis’ text *The Honourable and Hardworking Man* (*El hombre honrado y laborioso*) outlines the heights to which all men should aim in order to achieve such a title. The organization and content of the text reveals a pedagogic work: it shows defects and virtues, duties and obligations, the fruits of a good life marked by idleness and complacency or well sealed by hard work and happiness. It does not intend to prescribe or give directions on what one should do but pertinently shows the practices that define a hard working life: thrift, temperance, welfare, work, and the battle against passion and vices.

<sup>5</sup> The newspaper repeatedly points out this argument. The Republican relationship with a type of liberty and a disposition *towards* the truth is one of *El Huerfanito*’s most beloved subjects. In the words of the newspaper: “Nothing corrupts as much at such a tender age as a bad example. For this reason, they should always be protected from all kinds of seduction. This need has greater authority for governments whose motto is virtue. A good republican should be religious without hypocrisy. It is indispensable that first and for most they become fully aware of the

representation of itself as a moral community, that is to say, a community built on the learning of a catalog of virtues and vices. It is in these virtues and vices that the community will find its edification (if it follows the virtues and avoids the vices) or its ruin (if it gives free rein to the vices and forgets the virtues). However, the virtues, and the vices to be fought against, are not the same for all members of the Republic; there is a range of possibilities and moral games that open out in order to attempt to educate the Republic in moral standards. For all those who lead and will one day lead government work, for those who hold up their weapons in support of “republican edification”, or for him, who with his constant work, gives the Republic a material dwelling place.

The emphasis on the problem concerning the Republic’s moral foundations sheds light on a specific historical moment: the moment in which society confronts its own *auto institution* and the turmoil that accompanies such a process. Society attempts to represent itself and provides a distinct and specific legitimacy against the logic anchored in the figure of the king, the former basis of social order. From this point, the role of moral and its place in the creation of social order, changes. Society no longer demands obedience to the king nor maintains his symbolic power. Now society has to make sense of a world understood as a human creation. The certainty of a given world no longer holds strong and the permanent construction and maintenance of human order become primordial tasks (Lefort 1986/2004). Therefore, the human framework remains crossed by one single ambiguity: an unstable order in the permanent search for the promise of stability and certainty.<sup>6</sup>

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healthy rules of the pious Christian, because without this, they are not God fearing, they do not respect their parents or society, neither do they know themselves. (*El Huerfanito* 1826 2:5).

<sup>6</sup> It is not in my interest to fail to recognize the fine intrigues that crossed the Spanish Monarchy’s stability or fall into the typical representation of the 16th to 18th centuries as harmonious, homogenous and static. Works like those of McFarlane (1997), Bonnett (2002) and Herrera (2002) show this. In the Spanish American case, the works of Cañeque (2004), Garrett (2005) and Elliott (2006) insist in the same complexity on the colonial world. Even from another perspective, works like that of Santiago Castro point out that the Hispano-American image should not be taken as

It is within this framework that the moral concern to strengthen new men, in order to create a virtuous community, takes hold. However, authors and governments use as resources different traditions that merge along the same *interpretive gesture*.<sup>7</sup> The republican governments require that the Republic's authorities and provisions be respected as the only way to guarantee the citizens "enjoyment" of their "rights". If the Republic takes on the task of defining a community, moral is fundamental in marking what kind of community it is. In order to build the community it is necessary to form a *habit of obedience* to the law and *love* for both the Republic's institution and principles. Such objectives can only be achieved when an education in moral formation becomes a high priority government task: "the type of government has an immediate influence on the kind of education that it should offer the youth" (Bolívar 1819:3). Therefore, this education should be "great and extensive" when it comes to republican governments. The call is clear: for governments whose motto is virtue, whose standard is the moral force and whose enemy is vice, the formation of a moral community is a task that cannot be delayed: it is the "surest principle of general happiness, and the firmest foundation for the peoples' liberty" (Bolívar 1819:3). Francisco de Paula Santander

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the "simian expression of a postponed modernity" or the replica of an original. His question is for the specific neo New Grenadian image and the "place from which then image was read, translated and enunciated" (Castro 2005:15).

<sup>7</sup> Jacques Guilhaumou introduced this category as a way of showing the manner in which, in a single moment, references from distinct origins are taken and reordered in an attempt to understand a particular historical moment. The interpretive gesture allows one to see the way in which those "individuals – members of a society, in the context of intersubjective relationships, use the natural language for interpretive context, resource and theme, whilst at the same time giving sense to their actions with a reflexive discourse" (Guilhaumou 2004:50). Lucien Jaume, whilst not using this expression, takes the same line of thought when he remembers that the investigator's interest is not to "discover" that what a specific individual says is true or false, pure or contaminated, well read or badly read, but rather to ask *what* the individual *does when he says* something (Jaume 2004:113). Here the viewpoint is the particular form in which individuals face the world and take on a specific reading of the philosophical traditions at play, the currents of political thought and of the concrete moral concerns.

would endorse such a concern eleven years later when referring to the new constitution of 1832. The call is to the *citizens*, to whom he appeals to surround the government *that they themselves have established* and to work for public happiness. He also invokes those who exercise civil authority and who should contribute to the well-being of the Country. They should faithfully fulfill their obligations, establishing themselves “without reserve in the battle to eliminate ignorance and immorality through youth education and hard work” (Santander 1832b:187).

In the following sections, I would like to clarify three aspects: the complexities of this period, the kind of problems, for the contemporaries, the building of the Republic had to face, and the republic and the moral as objects of study from an historical anthropology perspective.

## 2.

When speaking about the epoch I do not refer to a fixed period. On the one hand, the moral imperative is a permanent condition for a type of political order that is trying to take form. On the other hand, the “political agitations” provide a specific nuance to moral claims and allegations, to neglected aspects and uncontrolled passion and in the same way to provoked virtues and exemplary men who serve as the foundation of the Republic. So, this text is concerned about an interval of time, as in all intervals of time, which contains a certain arbitrary viewpoint. In 1821, the battles and controversies over the form or forms that the newly born Republics should take were partially sealed. From this point, a call is made to create a moral community, to moralize its members and thus repair years of disaster and loss. Santander, in his position of Vice-president, once again invokes the need for moral education. His dispatch Secretaries and Simón Bolívar himself coincide with such insistence. However, towards 1827 the situation changes, Bolívar detracts from part of the project of *obedience to the law* undertaken years before. His dictatorial project questions faith in society’s auto institution and assumes that passion has run out of control. Liberty, understood as obedience to the law, has still not been assured. In

1832, following his exile, Santander arrives in the country to take up presidency of the Republic. At this time, images of reconstruction and moral cleansing are profuse. Santander gratifies the *virtuous people of New Granada* (Santander 1832:178) the advantageous opinion they deserve and announces his duty to consecrate himself to his work without reservation. He recognizes that the people's opinion of him is a favorable one and he exalts his "independence, liberty, honor, glory and happiness" which he will claim to always hold in his heart, "the preferred place for my comforts, interests, fortune and even my own life" (Santander 1832:178).

The main focal point in the forties will be to control "agitations" and passionate exuberance in society. This decade unmistakably marks the link between moral education and political concern. One figure summarizes this concern: Mariano Ospina Rodríguez, Government, Public Instruction and Foreign Affairs Minister (Jaramillo Uribe 1964/1996) between 1841 and 1845. A man who, in Samper's words "understood that a key factor in resolving social and political problems should lie in the direction given in state education. From this resolution, the university teaching Plan was drawn up in 1842" (Samper 1881:122). This text continued until the Study Plan came into effect in 1852, giving way to another way of conceiving education, moral education being part of this: that of "free" public and private colleges, which coincided with the total abolition of the universities and academic degrees. The changes in moral education significantly affected some students. However, if the university regime of 1842 appeared "oppressive (...) it formed many honest men who nowadays are distinguished citizens and raise the moral and social level of youth" (Samper 1881:127). It is unlike the Study Plan of 1853 in that, "the liberal party, eager to bring liberty to all areas, unfortunately (...) lacked sacred philanthropic duty" (Samper 1881:133).

Thus, the first half of the nineteenth century, usually portrayed as a "long wait" and a colonial continuity, cannot be viewed as a homogenous period. However, the question of setting up a social order, the basis of its legitimacy and of the men who should live within it and lead it provokes turmoil that this period captures with special emphasis. This persistent question beautifully embodies the

centrality of the turmoil that the men of this period experienced and the moral character of such concerns. In less than twenty years, the framework that gave meaning to the community had been transformed. A study plan had been implemented and the Central University, the Republic's special referent, had changed. The nature of education was debated. Numerous primary education and society houses were founded, as were patriotic societies.<sup>8</sup> Social gatherings were encouraged. Public debates and private concerns were reported in the newspapers. They arranged, compiled, made comment on and translated "the best of that which the most celebrated philosophers, speakers, politicians, historians, and poets from Greece, Rome, Germany, England, and France have left us" (Torres 1838:5). During this period, several moral concerns appear, as attached to the task of founding an order within the framework of the building of the Republic. In the following section, I delimit the meaning of *moral* and *republic* from an anthropological perspective, precisely, to historicize them.

### 3.

Moral, however, is not solely a concern of doctors and institutionalists, a simple objective of catechisms, compendiums and even grammarians. Exactly as Professor Rafael María Vásquez points out in 1832 it is impossible to consider moral youth education with indifference:

There will be sciences, knowledge of which will allow society to look on with indifference, but this cannot be the case for morals. How would man be able to manage his actions without rules? Take away morals and we will see that without them politics will be nothing more than a thankless art

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<sup>8</sup> These were conceived as voluntary associations made up of many virtuous citizens under a common objective: the good of the country and the teaching of its progress. Among the most recognized were Bogotá's Philanthropic Society, established in 1825, Bogotá's Primary Education Society (1834) and towards the middle of the century Bogotá's Artisan Society, later known as the Democratic Society. Among these societies statues we could highlight their emphasis in "procuring the teaching and progress in agriculture, public education, arts, trade and commerce in that which would reach the moral force and proportions of its individuals" (Sociedad filantrópica 1825:3).



to destroy the peoples' customs and that society will be a meeting of enemies ready to hurt each other (Vasquez 1832:VI).

Without this education, man is left without the means to direct his actions. It could be said that it is a concern of a “State in formation”, or that the “nation” founds itself in moral practice; I prefer to point out that the Republic appears to be a mandatory reference for grammarians, institutionalists, the military, priests, vicars, archbishops, publicists, journalists and authors of pamphlets and newspapers. This is not because references to state or nation did not appear in political vocabulary during the first decades of the nineteenth century, but because it is the Republic, and especially the republican country (*patria republicana*), that secures itself as a political representation with greatest force.<sup>9</sup> This republican government should assure the learning of virtues, procure the restraint of vices and direct passions to the right path.

The Republic does not only mean a system of representative government, it is also a privileged reference to the political community (the “people of the Republic”, the health of the Republic) and inclusive in its spatial meaning (the cities of the Republic, the *exterior of the Republic*). Furthermore, the Republic emphasizes the problem of society's institution itself, the referent by which it legitimizes social order. The Republic not only invokes itself as a government procedure but as a way of understanding social order. *Res Publica*: For the classic tradition in which nineteenth-century elite were educated, it was not only the form of government but also its substance. It is a question of giving content to public affairs, filling it with meaning, delimiting its spaces and guiding its individuals.

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<sup>9</sup> It is necessary to clarify that this understanding of the Republic is due to the types of sources in which this text is based. In the future, it will be necessary to widen the research to explore the spectrum of relationships woven at the point in time when they try to give name and form to the political community under construction.

The Republic is also a privileged reference for the political community. It is the Republic that fears and suffers, that shamelessly rises up and proclaims

CITIZENS! The Government will call on you shortly. It will show you the image of a Republic threatened on all sides with its heart torn apart by passion, and differences of opinions that make it unsure of itself. (*El Amigo*, 1828 11:43).

Therefore, the Republic is not only a physical space and political community. The people become an object of prime importance in the question of founding an order. It is precisely the Republican people that need to be created. Of the numerous queries of the time, two concerns are paramount: How could they guarantee compliance to the law, control passions and respect order without an external referent holding the same symbolic power of the King? In the same way, how could they guarantee that hardworking and honest men, with a charitable character would make up part of the Republic and at the same time resolve the constant question of the happiness for both the Republic and its people?

A central part in the building of the republican model, concerning virtue as a political raw material, is the classic antiquity. In fact, “the language of modern (republican) patriotism was built on the legacy of the ancients” (Viroli 1995:35). Such references routinely circulate in papers, newspapers, administrative messages and personal letters. They include the fluency, dignity and elegance of Cicerón’s dialogues and the imagination, beauty and richness of Plato (*Astrolabio* 1836 3:21). Constantine, the first Roman emperor in defense of Christianity, is a model, and even Epicurus serves as a spokesperson for a “dangerous and deceitful philosophy that the so called *learned* instill on the youth of New Granada” (*Astrolabio* 1836 2:13). Greece and Rome become archetypes for the political model at play: the Republic.<sup>10</sup> Catholic moral also merges into the *same*

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<sup>10</sup> Walter Benjamin points out that this centrality of the past means that history becomes the object of a construction whose place is “current time”, the *Jetztzeit* (now-time). For this reason he comments, “to Robespierre ancient Rome was a past charged with the time of the now, the French Revolution was therefore merely a wink to a restored Rome” (Benjamin 1971).

*interpretive gesture* (Guilhaumou 2004; Jaume 2004). The Roman Republic is based on the traditional morality of its men and the *res publica* refers to a public government, one that affects the people and is a people's government (D'ors 1984:24-25). Only a catholic, apostolic and roman religion can assure internal peace, the consecration to the cause of liberty, the most virtuous education and the fight against ignorance; just in this way can it be understood that two years after passing the Constitution of the Republic of Colombia José Manuel Restrepo, as Secretary of State and interior office, registers for the Congress, Senate and House of Representatives:

It is the duty of all well organized Republics to provide their religious ministers with efficient means to acquire the virtues and learning that their sacred ministry asks of them. For they are the moral inspectors and instillers who should battle vice, the fatal origin of crime and (...).

3<sup>rd</sup> That by virtue of these reasons and by the influence that priests have in directing souls, Colombia is drawn in the absolute necessity to promote in those who aspire to be priests, learning and regularity in customs (Restrepo 1823:106).

It is Catholic moral that allows for a definition of the limits and content of what exactly one should understand as virtuous, that which should be fought as vice and what to direct and contain as passion. This is because the roman Republic imposes itself with all its strength as a desired political model, with emphasis in the virtue of its men dedicated to the government, with its distinction between the crowd and the people and with its varying degrees of equality. Catholicism, however, is not the only source serving as a moral catalog. As we can see, during the XIX century the republican men share, promise and move distinct moral traditions: it is also an enlightened and bourgeois catalog; each one with its virtues emerges as a moral source.

Towards 1827, the Republican Congress recalls such an understanding of the Republic when it recognizes the need to promote an education that "guides the passion towards just and

noble ends, brings man closer to his maker, unites him with his country and makes him into a good father, husband and citizen” (*Gaceta* 1827:368). Three years after the first Constitution of the Republic of Colombia was passed, Restrepo himself points out that moral is not just something that should be instilled as a direct and fundamental object of education. Moral is also a force. It forms and encourages the ties that should unite men under a republican government.

Two and a half years have passed since our constitution was published and the experience of this period gives us slight hope for what is to come (...) the habit of obedience to the law, love and respect for its orders that give moral strength and consolidate political institutions, is being formed (*El Constitucional* 1824:4).

#### 4.

We need history, but we need it for different reasons than the idler, who wanders in the gardens of knowledge.  
 Federico Nietzsche,  
*On the Use and Abuse of History for Life*

Yet to speak of moral today is not as easy as it seems. Half way between political anthropology, theology and philosophy it is a little difficult to describe a moral world, realize the ways in which moral concerns are structured and the political problems that remain trapped in these problems.<sup>11</sup> However, in debates and discussions, in successful and unsuccessful businesses, in the political imagination of those in charge of building the Republic our estrangement with moral was a high priority problem. In fact, I use this word because individuals speak from it and insist in it as the force that sealed and gave order to life in society.

We can understand moral as a republican concern from an anthropological context if we understand it as a *perspective*, a

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<sup>11</sup> Fernando Escalante (1992) makes the difficulty with respect to the subject of moral and its understanding as an object of investigation from a social sciences perspective clear in his pioneering work *Imagined Citizens (Ciudadanos imaginarios)*.

*guide* that insists on the historically placed solution to the question of what it means to be a man. Different trends<sup>12</sup>, however, can be identified in an anthropological context. The trend that this text is interested in emphasizing is that which questions the essential meaning of man and humankind. A meaning that privileges the social strengths that define its outline, hopes, doubts and fears that societies leave in its representation. However, it is about a historical perspective that insists in an unresolved character, one that is evolving and historically defined by human processes and far removed from all *essentialist* perspective on man. To retake Pierre Bourdieu's expression, it is necessary for society to think of man in the *folds of history*, or in other words investigate and recognize what *to be a human being in different epochs* implies (Burke 1987).

The expression *horizon of meaning* could be useful to the purpose of historicizing human practice. By this, I mean the framework in which man grants meaning to his actions, and gives them their own particular stamp. In this way, the emphasis this text offers and wants to promote is the attempt to understand a society different to ours from its experience and the concerns about the means in which the human being has been defined, in this case informed by moral constraints and anxieties. By remembering this, it is possible to understand the place that moral occupied in the imagination of

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<sup>12</sup> Since the second half of the 20th Century the debate over the ties, coincidences and dissidences between anthropology and history have been prolifically worked on. The same, Evans-Pritchard pointed out, in a rather radical way, in a text titled *Anthropology and History* that "anthropology should choose between making history or nothing at all" (1961). However, such a debate gets interesting precisely because of the coincidence of perspectives and questions. At the end of the day because they share a problem that "in a general sense, is the same: to represent the way of life of a society different to our own" (Pitt-Rivers 1963:253). Historian Keith Thomas, a contemporary in the debate, also points out this point when he comments on the centrality of the *past imagination* in Evans-Pritchard's book about the Nuer. For Thomas a reconstructive act of this type meant an effort of imaginative viewpoint in which the "ethnographic present" is comparable to the "past present" (Thomas 1963:5). For other debates about the perspective see Faubion (1993); Viazzo (2003) and the works of John & Jean Comaroff (1992) who have highlighted the centrality of the *past imagination* in the *ethnographic imagination*.

the epoch and distinguish it not only from our current understanding but also from the place that we give to moral concerns today. In this way, the understanding of a horizon of meaning and the historical definition of the question of humankind means that problems such as moral, feelings, friendship, honor and talent become central objects of anthropological and historical reflection (Pitt-Rivers & Peristiany 1992).

The anthropological context tries something that according to Clifford Geertz (1973) would give it a certain “dense description”. That is, “an interpretation of the social interaction in a given society, in terms of its own rules and regulations” (Burke 1987). To speak of the interpretation of a given society in terms its own rules and regulations is to speak of the elements that a society grants in its construction. The acceptance of the human being as both *the creator and the created and as independent and dependent* (Süssmuth 1984) and all that this implies, means that with respect to the first half of the nineteenth-century moral is replanted as the axis of political thought. It is also a way of determining actions and reading the social world. If I speak of moral and politics within an anthropological context I do not speak of them as two objects that whilst related are separate. That is to say, moral is political and that politics is moral, at least in the way in which the actors of the period understood both words.

In this sense, we would need to approach this period since the allusion to politics as *horizon*. This is not just as function, technique or effective argument for institutionalized power but also as a centre from which society faces its own self-construction. It is a decisive reference point from which social relations are symbolically formed and ordered. It deals with approaching the political as “the place where the many strings of man’s and women’s life cross and are tied...” (Rosanvallon 2003:15). It is a perspective of meaning that changes the heterogeneity and social weave as a whole but also a process by which a human grouping progressively takes the form of a real community. The political implies the production – not free from conflict – of explicit and implicit participative rules and the resolution of ways of solidarity (Rosanvallon 2003).

From this perspective, moral language takes on importance as centre of political reflection and stops speaking of good and bad in terms of absolutes. It transforms rather into the unresolved problem of what specific content to give the meaning of good and bad. The question concerning that from which men accept or reject behavioral patterns and form opinions, desire, act and judge. Moral speaks of society personified. It speaks of a specific concept of man and of a specific way, historically situated, of responding to the question not only of a possible and attainable social order but also to that of the resources and materials to use in said construction. This semantic of the term moral reminds us of its eminent pragmatical character. Moral teaches of good and bad, vice and virtue. It is also concerned with providing practical content, showing how to be good and virtuous, or the form an immoral and disordered life takes. If anything highlights moral, it is that precepts and maxims are for pragmatism, not for dogmatism. They teach good behavior, good deeds and good living.

Despite the current inconvenience with the topic of moral, it is necessary to emphasize, "there is still much that can't be understood in any other way than the moral way" (Escalante 1992:21). However, to study moral is nothing more than to study "the moral concepts by simply reflecting, Oxford Armchair style, on that which those around them say or do" (Macintyre 1987:9). In this sense, "moral is no more than *the social* acting through individuals" (Escalante 1992:24). However, it speaks less of moral absolutes, logical deductions or submissions to general principles. It conceives moral as the result of "regular practice, where contingent agreements are in operation, rarely explicitly, over what is good and bad, how to do things and how to behave" (Escalante 1992:30). This is a morally political character tied to a definition historically placed of man. This character allows it to play the part of a privileged object of reflection from an anthropological viewpoint.

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Finally, if we could celebrate something about the bicentennial commemoration, it would be that it makes possible to revisit some of our assumptions about the nineteenth century. Taking this

*delirium* as an excuse, it is time to understand this century since its concerns regarding the construction of a social order, the resources with which it was supposed to construct that building, and the tensions that such order implied. That order at play, the desired order, was a republican one, not only in the sense of the allocation of power and the division to which this word usually refers nowadays, but also in its attempts to establish the political community as a group of virtuous and obedient men. In this way, it establishes the teaching and promotion of virtues and the identification and fight against vices as a priority. That was the kind of order that the actors of the early Republic wished, that was the community they sought to promote, that was the representation of a “life together” that they found almost impossible to build.

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