

FREE FROM WHAT? WHERE TO? AND THE ROLE OF THE CUBAN-AMERICANS

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Let me tell you that I feel rather awkward to address the “Cubans” (Cubans?) in English, but as I am a law abiding man, I accept the rules of the game. Hence, I know that what I am going to say may be a little daring to say the least, so let me start with one of José Martí’s poems:

Do not place me in darkness
to die as a traitor.
I am good, and as good
I will die facing the sun.

What I am going to say today is related not only to Cuba and the United States, but also to Western Civilization, and last but not least, my proposal for that very special breed, the so called Cuban-Americans. And let me point out to you that the denominations of Hispanics is unacceptable from the scientific as well as from the moral point of view. But I do not have time to delve into this subject, so let’s get to work (*manos a la obra*).

FREE FROM WHAT

The first question that I asked in the title of this reflections is free from what? And certainly, I think that if we cannot answer this question it will be rather difficult to find a way for a liberated Cuba. The more I read the Miami press, the more I think that there is a common agreement that as soon as the deity decides to call Fidel Castro into his or her womb, the sun of liberty will shine radiantly in Cuba. If that were the case, then I would be forced to blame God for being so harsh on our compatriots (are they?) as to postpone for such a long time this decision. Cer-

tainly, I do not accept this conclusion, but then I cannot accept the first one either.

The assumption that Cuba is an unlucky country that gave birth to Fidel Castro is as simplistic as to assume that Germany was very unlucky for having Hitler or Italy Mussolini and even more Russia with the “steel man,” Stalin. Nothing would be more damaging to the possibility of a new Cuba than to accept that simplistic approach.

And as the purpose of the annual reunion of ASCE is to provide intellectual means for transforming Cuba after Fidel, what you call “Cuba in transition,” we should acknowledge which were and are the determining factors which allowed the appearance and continuity of Mr. Castro at the helm. Well, maybe we all have forgotten Mr. Castro’s speech, I guess it was on the 7th of January 1959, when the pigeon rested on his shoulder and he asked “¿Voy bien, Camilo?” I remember that he said we are here not thanks to the Pentagon but against the will of the Pentagon and regretted that in 1898 it was not the lone star flag the one that flew at the Morro. I think that that was a political definition which decided the future of revolutionary Cuba. I do remember that since that very day, everyone who dared to disagree with the revolution was anti-revolutionary and *el paredón* was the deserved punishment. I also remember that only those people who were *siquitrillados*—sorry, I don’t have a translation for that word—could have a reason for complaining, but the large majority of the Cubans were having the luck of living in the *territorio libre de América* and we believed it.

I do think that if we are going to talk about historical luck, Cuba was a privileged country. Given its insularity it was not possible for the Cubans to have independence until almost the end of the century. And let me tell you, the Spaniards were backward but to some extent it was better to live under the *Leyes de Indias* imposed by them than when they were enforced by the *criollos* as Alberdi very well expressed. So we were spared of all the hazards and civil wars which plagued the rest of the continent led by the caudillos after independence.

Now I know that what I'm going to say may send me right back to the *paredón* but I am going to say it any way. So please, listen; when we finally got the independence from Spain at the end of the historically-called Spanish-American War we did it under the aegis of the greatest civilization ever produced by humankind: the United States of America. As a consequence of this epic luck, of which 100 years have elapsed, Cuba could learn the difference between independence and freedom.

The Americans decided the war against Spain, and when they finally declared the independence of Cuba in 1902, they left their legacy of individual rights, the real meaning of freedom in the Bill of Rights included in the so-called provisional Constitution. Even José Duarte Oropesa, who certainly is not very keen about the Americans in his book *Historiología Cubana*, said with respect to that Constitution: "to the Cubans, for centuries, victims of the Spanish despotism, it seemed incomprehensible because it contained phrases and rights that up to that moment we did not know." Moreover, the great thinker Enrique José Varona in a letter to General Ramos wrote: "The United States have saved Cuba for civilization and humankind: and this is an eternal title to our gratitude, it gives them in the eyes of the world and in the present state of our relations under international law, a title that no power could dispute, to consider themselves a part in the constitution of our definitive government."

Unfortunately, the views of Varona, which I have only partially quoted, were not shared by the majority of the Cubans who then and probably until now were under the spell of the Martian romanticism.

That ethical duality, which has characterized our continent South of Rio Grande in which we apply the Don Quixote morality to judge our neighbors while we keep for ourselves the "wisdom" of Sancho Panza. Hence, instead of appreciating the American influence on our shores, we kept thinking about the Platt Amendment. Once again, in our case forms and words prevailed over substance and Martí's lyrics sounded in our ears but very far from our deeds. "Con los pobres de la tierra quiero yo mi suerte echar" was the life project of *el apóstol*. Hence, we cannot be surprised that in the last visit of Pope Juan Pablo II to La Habana, Fidel could have said that he had accepted his visit now that the Church had changed and was, as he always was, in favor of the poor, the so-called "preferencia por los pobres." In only 25 years after the abolition of the Platt Amendment, with full sovereignty, Fidel Castro brought us all to the communist paradise, at the rhythm of the song "Cuba sí, Yankees no."

I know that anyone could ask me, then, if this ethical duality is common to all Latin America, as it was defined by the Ariel of the Uruguayan Enrique José Rodó, why was it only Cuba that reached that extreme? This is a valid question and my answer, which could be controversial, is that the army put some limits in those countries to the fantasies of socialist utopia. With the full approval of our excellent democratic class, Grau San Martín, Carlos Prío, Carlos Saladrigas, Sergio Carbó and the Directorio Revolucionario, the country was put in the hands of the sergeants. The sergeants turned it back to the revolutionaries and Cuba was the only country in the continent where the guerrillas with majority support won the war.

I would say that the answer to my first question is that the Cubans should be free from the ethical duality in which socialism is based. And this is an important message, because I have to say to my economist colleagues that there are not economic problems but ethical and political ones. Socialism and capitalism are not two different economic systems, but two diametrically different ethical approaches to human nature.

It is obvious that my answer to the first question is that Castro is an accident though a long term one, but what matters is to be free from the rational and/or sentimental attachment to socialism. The hatred of Castro and the love of socialism may be the recipe for disaster in the future Cuba. It has already been a determining factor in the enactment of the Helms-Burton law and the embargo, whose failure is proven by the very permanence of Castro regime for forty years only ninety miles from the United States. And socialism, in that sense, is not only an ideology as such which people may reject. Socialism is based on the assumption that generosity and solidarity can be the basis of political institutions. Those may be attractive, as Adam Smith very well explained, but can never be the basis on which freedom and justice can be achieved in society.

I think that by now it is very clear that if the Cubans in Cuba – now, I don't know if there are others – thought that Castro betrayed the revolution and that Martí's idyllic concepts of democracy as presented in the program of the Cuban Revolutionary Party prevailed, the tyranny would collapse into chaos in the future. Because as Edward Burke wisely said with respect to the French Revolution: "For having the right to everything they lack everything." And allow me to say that when people believe that they have the right to everything and they lack everything, the only political alternative is dictatorship; witness the majority of the Eastern European countries where the Communist are back in town. That is, if people expect that the so-called capitalist system will deliver the unfulfilled promises of socialism, the communists will be back in the future.

WHERE TO

Then, where to? To answer this question I will have to transcend the Cuban shores to delve into the very meaning of the so called Western Civilization. There is no such thing as Western Civilization, allow me to say without having again to face the *paredón*. The history of the West in terms of freedom has been as poor if not worse than the Oriental counterparts. We do not know very much about the latter, sometimes because of lack of communications and others due to the lack of interest.

But we should remember that the survival of Europe was more luck than wisdom and certainly not because Europe was the land of morality and freedom. There is no doubt, however, that at the end of the century, what we call the West has reached a level of well being and freedom that was completely unknown in history. It is then of the utmost importance to find out the reasons why this is so. Now more than ever, because of what is known as globalization, a kind of historical determinism that projects societies to wealth and freedom regardless of their values and cultures has been almost accepted. I do believe that for better or for worse, history—in spite of Kant, Hegel or Marx—is in the hands of men, and not the other way around.

An unfortunate event has contributed to a large extent to a great misunderstanding on this subject. The French Revolution, produced under the spell of the enlightenment, endarkened the world through the absolute of reason. A new absolute took the place of the deity in order to oppress and kill in the name of rationally and goodness. Absolute love and absolute reason became the tools for oppression on behalf of absolute goodness. As Alberdi said "everybody wanted to be a hero and nobody was satisfied to be a man."

Instead of "sapere aude" we should accept "non sapere aude," that is you have to dare not to know; that is that rationality is not a synonym of "truth." Knowledge is contingent precisely because, as Hume wisely observed, we are saved from total skepticism through the non rational aspects of our nature.

The West, then, is not a historical pattern of virtue. After the collapse of the feudal system and what may be called the oppression of the faith, two different ways were open to the West. On one side, the enlightenment, with Descartes followed by Rousseau, Kant, Hegel and Marx, developed a mix of rationalism and romanticism which gave rise to the totalitarian systems that appeared in the West during the twentieth century. Despotism had been known throughout history, but only in the West did political philosophy rationalize and revalue the authoritarian state in the name of order as the only alternative to chaos. Hitler, Mussolini and Stalin were the prod-

uct of that approach, in which the rationality of man deprived him of its complex nature.

As a consequence, an entelechy called sovereignty deprived him of his will and created the state as the very representation of the ethicality of the society against the concupiscence of private interest. In Hegel's words, the state was the divine idea as it was manifested on earth. That is what Alberdi called the Latin freedom. He asked himself what is Latin freedom and responded: "It is the freedom of all, consolidated in one and only collective and solidary liberty, whose exclusive execution is in the hands of a free emperor or a liberator Czar. It is the freedom of the country personalized in its government and its government in its totality personalized in one man."

Sovereignty was the right to arbitrary rule in defense of national interests. Then, war was the name of the game and racism intermingled with tribal passion to build absolute power in the name of national interest. It was Hegel who said in his *Philosophy of Law* that war is the way to keep in equilibrium the ethical health of the people. On the other hand, and coming out from the same way of thinking, Marx, another representative of enlightened Western thought, substituted the war between states for the war between classes in order to suppress the alienation caused by private property as the dialectical dynamic of history. Concentration camps and Gulags were the final development of those utopias as the specter of Rousseau haunted over the head of the incorruptible while other heads ran down the drain under the ethical prevalence of the guillotine, administrated by the public health committee.

It was on the other side of the British Channel that a more modest approach to human nature prevailed and political thinking was mainly concerned with human frailty in order to guarantee men rights under proper institutions. In the words of Locke, men had the rights to life, freedom, property and the pursuit of happiness. These rights did not derive from government but it was the duty of government to protect and guarantee them. The entelechy of sovereignty as the absolute power had been replaced by the rule of law which set a limit to political power on the recognition that governments were framed by men.

Locke wrote: "But I shall desire those who make this objection to remember that absolute monarchy is but men: and if government is to be the remedy of those evils which necessarily follow from men being judges of their own cases, and the state of nature is therefore not to be endured, I desire to know what kind of government that is, and how much better it is than the state of nature, where one man commanding a multitude has the liberty to be judge his own case, and may do to all his subjects whatever he pleases without the least question or control of those who execute his pleasure?... Is one to think that men are so foolish that they take care to avoid what mischiefs may be done to them by polecats or foxes but are content to be devoured by lions."

This different approach represented a new covenant between the government and the governed, where private interests were not supposed to be against the general interest but ethically accepted in accordance to general rules to be applied and enforced by governments. That was the underlying reason of the Bill of Rights, and the very foundation of justice as it was well expressed by David Hume in his *Treatise on Human Nature* where he said: "It is only from the selfishness and confined generosity of men, along with the scanty provision that nature has made for his wants, that justice derives its origins"... "Increase to a sufficient degree the benevolence of men or the bounty of nature and you render justice useless by supplanting its place with much nobler virtues and more valuable blessings."

I'm not going to insist further on the ethical aspects of liberalism but let me say that those principles were the ones that were fully recognized on this side of the Atlantic in the construction of the United States. It was Madison who best expressed the concern for human frailty when he said in the *Federalist Papers*: "It may be a reflection on human nature, that such devices should be necessary to control the abuses of government. But what is government itself if not the greatest of all reflection of human nature? If men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external or internal controls on government would be necessary. In framing a government which is to be administered by

men over men, the great difficulty lies in this. You must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself. A dependence on the people is no doubt the primary control on the government; but experience has taught mankind the necessity of auxiliary precautions.”

Those were the same principles that recognized the necessity of insuring private property from the demagoguery of the assemblies, notably the Congress. That is, the protection of minorities from the force of majorities. And that was why he also said: “In a society under the form of which the stronger faction can readily unite and oppress the weaker, anarchy may as truly said to reign, as in the state of nature, where the weaker individual is not secured against the violence of the stronger.”

The limitation to majority power in the name of the rule of law through the Supreme Court is undoubtedly the main tenet of the Republican system as developed and implemented by the Americans to protect private interest and individual rights. This ethical approach is at the same time the support of the so called capitalism system. That is why there is no contradiction between American democracy – the dream of individual freedom of Washington, Jefferson, Madison, Lincoln—and Wall Street or Madison Avenue. It was this symbiotic feed back between political freedom and private interest that decided the success of the American society. That universal principle applied to a universal society as against the parochialism of the “Europe de les patries” sustained on the confusion between socialism and democracy that characterized the failures of democracy both in Europe prior to the Second World War and in Latin America up to the present.

Unfortunately, a further confusion has arisen on account of the social-democratic path of the European countries. It was Edward Bernstein who in his *Preconditions of Socialism* stated: “It is indeed true that the great liberal movement of modern times has in the first instance benefited the capitalist bourgeoisie, and that the parties which took the name of liberal were or became in time, nothing but straight forward defenders of capitalism. There can of course, be

nothing but enmity between these parties and Social Democracy. But with respect to liberalism as a historical movement, socialism is its legitimate heir not only chronologically, but also intellectually.” Definitely, Bernstein's confusion remains up to the present, with the failure to realize that liberalism and socialism, as was said above, are two different perceptions about human nature and consequently also about political institutions.

That confusion results from a great misunderstanding between continental rationalism cum romanticism and the pragmatic (empiricist) and skeptical philosophical approach of the Anglo-Saxons. In Bernstein own words, his basic confusion was stated as follows: “As a movement opposed to the subjection of nation to institutions which are either imposed from without or which have no justification but tradition, liberalism first sought its realisation as the sovereignty of the age and of the people, both of which principles were endlessly discussed by the political philosophers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries until Rousseau, in the Social Contract, established them as the basic conditions of legitimacy of any constitution; and in the democratic constitution of 1793, imbued with the spirit of Rousseau, the French Revolution proclaimed them the inalienable rights of man...” “The constitution of 1793 was the logical expression of the liberal ideas of the epoch, and a cursory glance at its content shows how little it was, or is, an obstacle to socialism.”

I would say that Bernstein was right in his conclusion, although not so much on the premises, where he based liberalism in the Social Contract of “the Newton of moral science,” as Kant called Rousseau. It should not be surprising then, that continental liberalism through the democratic process misled the Europeans to confuse democracy with socialism, as it had been already done by Montesquieu. It was the Baron de Secondat who in *The Spirit of Laws* wrote: “The love of democracy is the love of equality. To love democracy is to love frugality. If everybody has the same well-being and the same advantages, then all should enjoy the same pleasures and the same hopes: this is something that cannot be attained if frugality is not general.” And he continues: “In a de-

mocracy, the love of equality sets a limit to ambition, only wishing to do more services to the fatherland, more and greater services than to the other citizens. Just for being born there is a debt to the fatherland that it is never paid.”

Here again, we not only perceive that the very idea of democracy is socialism but that citizens should only have duties and of course the fatherland will be always represented by the state. The entelechy is built from the fallacy of the assumptions with respect to human nature, but the power is guaranteed to those very men who will try to force equality on others. The democratic failures in Europe prior to the Second World War should be a lesson. Unfortunately, the Europeans are deeply socialist, nationalist and racist and the present welfare state is the product of those assumptions which, as we have said before, have very little to do with the American capitalism.

Let me now say some words about Latin America, where the French Revolution disease produced the death at birth of republican governments. This dramatic difference between the political conceptions of what we may call liberal rationalism was closely perceived by Alberdi and also by Domingo Faustino Sarmiento. The third President of Argentina (1868-1874) said in his *Commentaries to the Argentine Constitution* with respect to the United States: “in the United States all the parties agree over what in the rest of the world is the cause or ordinary pretext for revolutions and despotism.” This is the idea that put Argentina on the way of the universal Anglo-Saxon political project and in only fifty years converted a desert into one of the richest countries of the world at the beginning of twentieth century. But it was more than that: Argentina was actual proof that the universality of the so-called new covenant as expressed in the Bill of Rights is not only a privilege of the Anglo-Saxons who discovered it, but a possibility for any country which accepts and implements it regardless of race or creed.

The rest of the continent did not have so much wisdom. There the French endarkment in collusion with or in opposition to the Spanish one determined the poverty of the continent as well as the resentment of the large majority of our intellectuals with respect

to the success of the United States. Unfortunately as Luis Alberto Herrera, the Uruguayan politician, said in his *La Revolución Francesa y Sud América*: “The French Revolution continues, though from its grave, governing our independent destinies.”

Allow me to quote some other thoughts of Mr. Herrera, which I consider as valid at this time of so-called “globalization” as when they were first expressed in 1910: “Whereas the Anglo-Saxon child (the United States), loyal to his tradition, grew with the healthy practice of the law, without doubting that in his own person, and not in the country of origin, dwelled the fate of his own will, the Latin children only understand that same right as a benevolent grant of the semidivine chief of the great colonial machine, and was never able to know how to put in motion that concept, deprived of the opportunity to execute it through suffrage”... “All our tyrants and all organized political calamities have found in that inexhaustible fountain declamation over rights, freedom, sovereignty, royalty, the oppressed people, the social welfare, the universal suffrage, etc. a formidable defensive shield for their assaults”.... “It is very sad that South America insists on adoring general ideas, that trying to define too much, define nothing instead of accepting the temperament of the precious political contradictions taught by the masters in the managing of free institutions”... “The French Revolution told us, and we believed with Rousseau, that it was our humanitarian duty to rebuild the society by suppressing hierarchies, conventionalisms and prejudices, and above all it propelled us to the democratic hallucinations with its uncontrollable interpretation of the sovereignty of the people.” And last, but not least, he wrote: “No nation has given such a wonderful life to the free institutions as the United States. The humankind has never known such a powerful republican organization.”

It was another Latin-American, the Venezuelan Carlos Rangel, who clearly recognized the character of our tragedy and in his *Del Buen Salvaje al Buen Revolucionario*, where the specter of Rousseau and the Jacobins intermingle with the specter of Marx and communism. He wrote: “And the gravest thing of all is that the difference between the two Americas is not

only economic and power success, but also public and private morality.”

Then, my answer to the second question is that there are two dramatically opposed ethical and political approaches to society: the rationalism of the French Revolution, on the one hand, and what may be called the skepticism of the Anglo-Saxons, on the other. It is through this second approach that we should try to understand the way to freedom and justice.

I think that I have gone longer than I intended on the reasons for my answer to my second question “where to?” The answer seems to be in front of our eyes, but unfortunately we have been able to perceive the results but never understood the reasons. Particularly our *apóstol* experienced this partial knowledge, under the influence of the romantic Rousseau. Then, what is important is to distinguish the abysmal difference between individual rights as the fundamental character of the very concept of freedom, and the socialist approach of social rights and sovereignty.

I'm sorry to say to my friends and economist colleagues: the problems is not the control of the money supply or the budget deficit. The problem is created when the security of individual rights is politically overwhelmed by the majority rule of apparent equal rights enforced by government. The lack of private participation in the production of goods and services is replaced by the very generous function of redistributing wealth, which results in the accumulation of power to satisfy the private interest of the bureaucracy through the very unproductive process of redistributing poverty. The business of virtue substitutes for the business of producing wealth and tyranny arises as the only alternative to chaos.

THE ROLE OF CUBAN-AMERICANS

Now that I think that I have answered my two questions in the sense that we have to be free not from Castro but from socialism and that the process to imitate is the American Republic, let me address what I have called the role of the Cuban-Americans in the continent.

There is something that it is not possible to deny. That is the success of the Cuban-Americans in the United States and in particular in Miami. I am not

going to delve into the description of the history of this successful process of reaccommodation to this society, which only ninety miles from Cuban shores was alien in thoughts and feelings to our culture. Then, it is necessary to answer another question: why did you not do it in Cuba?

Allow me not to include myself into the question because I am not a Cuban-American and I have not produced any success anywhere. We may come back to the first simplistic approach and answer: because of Fidel. Well, but Fidel was not there before 1959. Again, we could blame Batista (1933-1944 and 1952-1959), or if we go back in history we could mention Machado. Well, they were all Cubans as far as I know, and although I have to acknowledge that economically we were ahead of the majority of the Latin American countries, that was not certainly true with respect to our political behavior and institutions. I apologize if I have said something that may offend someone, but believe me, I would like it not to be true.

We should acknowledge that to some extent the system that has allowed the success of the Cuban-American has to be confirmed by your political behavior. In that sense, it is of the utmost importance that Miami not be confused with what happened in Washington. Majority rule is not necessarily equal to justice. Your behavior, in that sense, is before the eyes of Latin Americans who, deep in their hearts are closer to Castro than to the United States in spite of the recent democratic changes. Your failure in this area is a success for Mr. Castro.

For sometime we could even think, though it may sound somewhat petulant, that the first Cuban immigration pertained to a sort of elite. That may be, but it is also true that during the last 39 years, Cubans of all classes continued deserting and apparently the majority of them participate in this successful experience. Even more other Latin Americans have come now to participate too, although their countries are not even similar to what you have created in this area.

I know that many Cubans logically still have their soul *in la tierra más hermosa que ojos humanos vieron*,

but if they look deep into their soul they know that never in Cuba did they have the opportunity to achieve in their lifetime what they achieved in this land of opportunity. Even more, they know that this would have been impossible in any other country in the world; of course, I am including the other industrial countries. We should also know that in Cuba we would not have accepted this tide of immigration, which still pretends not to assimilate and speak an alien language in the face of the original immigrants. In fact I would say that this has been for the Cubans a lucky misfortune.

Well, I am going to risk an answer. The institutional system. But this institutional system has not been created in a vacuum of values and principles. They are based on respect for private interest and the conscientious acceptance of human frailty as the basic tenet of the institutional structure. We may even say or believe that American society now takes its institutions for granted and has forgotten about the roots. That may be true, but we should not forget that the triumph of the Americans over the Soviets was not due to their inherent talents or their knowledge of mathematics or physics. As Alberdi used to say: "South America has been disorganized by the talented people." It is the system that converts mediocrity into excellence through striving and responsibility instead of assuming excellence to justify mediocrity and irresponsibility.

I know that the purpose of this already well known seminar on "Cuba in Transition" is to provide some sort of knowledgeable assistance to the *Cuba que sufre*. But I am going to propose a more challenging, and at the same time more rewarding, objective to this prosperous and successful community. Like the Argentines in the second half of the nineteenth century, the Cuban-Americans are living within the institutional framework created by the Anglo-Saxons without changing their race, their culture or even their language. And like the Argentines of that time, you are reaping the benefits of this unique environment in freedom and well-being. Like them, you are

now an example to the rest of the continent that it is possible to accept a universal civilization without relinquishing your culture as long as you respect the culture of the other without breaking the rules of the civilization.

The whole continent is in transition and it is possible that such transition will be more accelerated than the one that we may expect in Cuba. And this transition is not an economic transition but an ethical and political transition. I know that Claudio Loser is going to speak about this subject. But I insist that economic efficiency is never a sufficient argument against the utopian aspiration of socialism. As I said before, if people expect that capitalism will deliver the promises of socialism, capitalism is dead before being born.

As you know, Miami has been selected as the site for the negotiations for the ALCA (Free Trade Agreement of the Americas) for the next two years. That is a sort of recognition to the Cuban-Americans' success in converting Miami in the key to Latin America. I propose to open ASCE to the rest of the continent and to provide them with the Cuban-American experience. The Cuban-Americans are still more Cuban than American. That is, you are still Latin, but instead of Martí's experience you know the entrails, and the monster is not a monster. While we attempt this continental project of communication and sharing, we are also helping the future of Cuba: to return to the womb of a continent, in transition to the universal civilization not on account of a technological revolution, but as a result of a different conceptualization of ethics as the only support for the development of free institutions.

And to finish this already long *perorata* allow me to say something in Spanish:

Yo quiero, cuando me muera,
con Patria pero sin amo,
en la tierra que libertad me dio
haber contribuido un poco
a que otros menos afortunados
tengan mejor oportunidad que yo.