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“Towards an Ethic without Dogma” and “Moral Forces” Two perennial works by Argentinian psychiatrist, philosopher, and ardent champion of reason José Ingenieros

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ABSTRACT

Argentinian psychiatrist José Ingenieros (1877-1925), Professor of Experimental Psychology at the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Buenos Aires, is the author of one of the earliest works in biological psychology (1910). Physician, philosopher, and political activist, Ingenieros was the first psychologist in South America who tried to establish a comprehensive system based on developmental, evolutionary and sociogenetic biopsychology and on positivist philosophy. The impressive list of his publications includes 47 books and 484 articles, generally divided into two chronological periods: studies in mental pathology and criminology (1897-1908) and studies in philosophy, psychology and sociology (1908-1925). The present article presents a synopsis of his works Towards an Ethic without Dogma, and Moral Forces, two of his fundamental contributions to the field of Ethics.

KEY WORDS: *Ethics; Positivism; Biopsychology; History of science*

“Es giebt gar keine moralischen Phänomene, sondern nur eine moralische Ausdeutung von Phänomenen”²

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2 [There are no moral phenomena at all, just a moral interpretation of phenomena]. F. Nietzsche, (1886). *Jenseits von Gut und Böse. Vorspiel einer Philosophie der Zukunft*. Leipzig: C. G. Naumann.

INTRODUCTION

José Ingenieros (Fig. 1), one of Argentina's most estimable intellectuals, continues to be a highly read author in Latin America and a luminary for generations. His writings touch on politics, philosophy, neurology, psychiatry, psychology, criminology, history, critical essay, morals and sociology (Editorial, 1925; P. Ingenieros, 1927; Taiana, 2005; Triarhou & del Corno, 2006).

Ingenieros is credited with the first attempt in South America to establish a biological psychology almost a century ago (Ingenieros, 1910). His synthetic scheme of psychology was weaved from positivist philosophy, with a heavy emphasis on the science of experience, and the principles of physical chemistry, indicting psychic phenomena at ontogenetic, evolutionary and sociogenetic levels (Ingenieros, 1911; Ingenieros, 1913).

"Giuseppe (Ingenieros)" was born on 24 April 1877 in Palermo, Sicily. (The name was "castilianised" to José Ingenieros for his European publications from 1912 onwards.) The family moved to Montevideo, Uruguay, some time after 1880 and settled in Buenos Aires in September 1885. A child prodigy at age 7, Ingenieros completed his primary education at "Ocebral al Norte" and



Fig. 1. Dr. José Ingenieros (1877-1925).

in 1888 was enrolled in the “Colegio Nacional Central de Buenos Aires”, obtaining the baccalaureate in 1892. His father, a journalist, had a book-shop, and urged José from early on to read, write, and translate English, Italian and French texts.

In 1897 Ingenieros earned a degree in Pharmacy from the University of Buenos Aires and in 1900 he graduated from Medical School.

PROFESSIONAL LIFE

In 1904 the National Academy of Medicine of Buenos Aires awarded Ingenieros the gold medal (Premio de la Academia de Medicina) for best medical work published nationwide, for his book *Simulation in the Struggle for Life*, his doctoral thesis – where he affirmed that the struggle of the classes is one of the manifestations of the struggle for life – and *Simulation of Madness*. Those two works, combined into a single 500-page long book (Ingenieros, 1903), are probably the first South American book on feigned insanity. A Greek translation of the first of these works was published in Athens (Ingenieros, 1923).

Ingenieros began his professional career in nervous and mental pathology. He became Head of the Clinic of Nervous Diseases (Clínica de Enfermedades Nerviosas) of the Faculty of Medicine of the University of Buenos Aires and Chief of the Service of Observation of the Mentally Ill at Argentina’s Federal Police (Servicio de Observacion de Alienados de la Policva Federal Argentina).

In 1904 Ingenieros substituted as Professor of Psychology at the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters of the University of Buenos Aires. In 1908 he was appointed to the Chair of Experimental Psychology in the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters. That same year he founded the *Sociedad de Psicología*; its first President was the eminent researcher Horacio G. Piçero, who in 1900 had established the first Psychological Laboratory in the University of Buenos Aires. Ingenieros was elected President of the Argentina Medical Association in 1909 and President of the Society of Psychology in 1910.

In May 1911 the Council of the Faculty of Medicine nominated him unanimously for the Chair of Legal Medicine. However, the President of Argentina at the time (Sáenz-Peña) vetoed the nomination and instead appointed the second runnerup. That episode caused Ingenieros to openly express his anger against the President in a public letter, considering such an act as government immorality. He distributed his books among friends and institutions, and went on a selfimposed exile to Europe from 1911-1914, returning to Buenos Aires only after Peña’s death.

During the University reform that took place in Argentina after World War I, Ingenieros became Vice Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters, but soon resigned from all his teaching and administrative posts at the University of Buenos Aires in 1919. In the same year Ingenieros accepted an interview with President Hipólito Yrigoyen – who had won the elections with his Radical Party when the secret ballot was introduced in 1916, beginning a 14-year period in government – for exchanging opinions on the social and political crisis that the country was experiencing. An account of the encounter was written by his daughter Delia Ingenieros de Rothschild, under the pseudonym Delia Kamia (1957).

In 1920 Ingenieros adhered to the progressive group *Claridad*, which Anatole France and other intellectuals had founded in France. In his 1921 work *Los Tiempos Nuevos* he defended the Bolshevik Revolution and was critical of the intervention policy of the United States in Latin America. In 1922 he proposed the foundation of the Latin American Union (Editorial, 1923), and three years later he co-authored, with Alfredo L. Palacios, the founding act of *Unión Latinoamericana*.

PHILOSOPHICAL NATURALISM AND EVOLUTIONARY POSITIVISM

“Positivism” was a philosophical stance comprising scientific, deterministic, psychological, evolutionary, biological and sociological topics. Positivists admired Darwin and prized Comte and Spencer as their philosophical heroes. Preference for one or the other gave rise to evolutionary or social positivist accounts, respectively. Positivists rejected a priori intuitive methodologies and praised science as providing the most reliable knowledge about humans and the universe, and tried to produce syntheses of scientific findings in which they elucidated the nature of physical, biological, psychological and social phenomena (Rabossi, 2003).

The number of Latin American positivist thinkers is large, and their extraction and importance diverse; it is generally agreed that Ingenieros, along with Venezuelan-Chilean Andrés Bello (1781-1865) and Cuban Enrique José Varona (1849-1933) were among the most original and influential ones. Other important positivists in Latin America were Gabino Barreda (1820-1881) and Luis Villoro (b. 1922) of México and Carlos Vas Verreira (1871-1958) of Uruguay (Gracia & Millán, 1995).

The list of original pieces produced during the positivist period by Latin American philosophers includes Ingenieros’s *Psicología Genética* (Ingenieros, 1911) and *Psicología Biológica* (Ingenieros, 1913). Ingenieros helped introduce to Argentina Auguste Comte’s positivism (Corsini, 2002). Evolu-

tionary positivism gained particular popularity among several scientists at the University of Buenos Aires, including Ramos-Mejía, palaeontologist Florentino Ameghino, sociologist Carlos Octavio Bunge, and Ingenieros, who exercised considerable influence although they did not formally found a school (Martí, 1998).

In his *Genetic Psychology*, Ingenieros begins as a committed evolutionist, but admits the need for improvement, feeling that inductivism neglects the speculative aspect of science. As a solution, in his book *Propositions on the Future of Philosophy*, a programme to define philosophy along scientific positivist lines), he proposes an experiential metaphysics that could generate future scientific hypotheses (Ingenieros, 1918). *Propositions* is one of his most original works; in it, Ingenieros exposes a version of positivism that made metaphysics possible. He maintains that it is possible to recognize, in all form of experience, an “experiential remainder” (*residuo experiencial*) that is not unknowable, although it does not have a transcendental character.

TOWARDS AN ETHIC WITHOUT DOGMA

In 1917 Ingenieros occupied, due to a temporary absence of Dr. Rodolfo Rivarola, the Chair in the Department of Ethics, and worked towards developing the definitive form of his book *Hacia una Moral sin Dogmas* (Ingenieros, 1917), which he revised two years later (Ingenieros, 1919a, 1962a). In that work he made an attempt to ground ethics on idealism and evolutionary theory and pursued an idealism that can be only justified in evolutionary terms. At the time of the second publication, he also wrote a brief essay on the moral of Ulysses (Ingenieros, 1919b). *Hacia una Moral* was posthumously translated into Portuguese (Ingenieros, 1957a), while it is still in print in Argentina to date (Ingenieros, 2002).

From an ethical viewpoint, *Hacia una Moral* is a strong and contagious affirmation of optimism (Van Der Karr & Basile, 1977). Fagg (1969) calls Ingenieros “a skeptic”, but this can be misleading, if not false, as irony and materialism can be confounded with skepticism and pessimism. Nevertheless, Ingenieros does have a dogma that at times appears fanatic: this particular work of his is a hymn to work, civilized life, and progress (Blanco, 1925).

In his 1917 Preface, Ingenieros wrote: “These lessons on Emerson and ethicism were given in June of 1917 in the Chair of Ethics of Professor Rodolfo Rivarola. The Philosophy and Letters Student Center has had the kindness of providing me with a tachygraphic version, expressing the desire for me to publish them; such a happy circumstance allows me to save this part of the invisible work in which all we professors consume our activity. To correspond

better to the benevolent, which is also my desire, because I have never spoken to my students on topics that do not interest me, I have revised the text, partially rewriting it, festinantis calami, and intercalating in it certain fragments, which I could only allude to by the measure of time. Some reader may notice frequent parenthetical remarks on incidental themes; as long as we speak without having that happy memory which constitutes the secret of good improvisers, we are condemned to such unexpected hilarities. And when we see in writing that which we speak, we are surprised at our incapacity to speak the way we write. If the reader is a friend, his affection will dispense of such slips during the reading and will pass from height the certain imperfection of style, which is only clear.”

In the revised second edition of 1919, he indicated that “Friendly suggestions have induced me to slightly rearrange the contents of this volume; several fragments of the text appear reunited in a first chapter or lesson, with the intention of clarifying the main ideas, facilitating the reading of the set.”

The following is an outline of the subject matter of *Hacia una Moral sin Dogmas*.

Dogmatism and experience – I. What is dogma? II. The revealed dogmas. III. The rational dogmas. IV. The social character of moral experience. V. The relativity of knowing excludes dogmatism. VI. The general results of moral experience

Emerson and his medium – I. A moralist. II. The puritan surroundings. III. Channing and Emerson. IV. Deception of the philosophical mode. V. Transcendentalism. VI. Moral geography of the United States. VII. Sarmiento and Horacio Mann. VIII. Life in Concord. IX. Emerson and Sarmiento

Moral orientations – I. An ethic without metaphysics. II. The critique of customs. III. Necessity of firm characters. IV. Non-conformism and obedience. V. Pantheism. VI. Naturalist ethic. VII. Optimism and perfectibility. VI-II. Confidence. IX. The beautiful nonsense. X. Social function of non-conformism.

Social ethic – I. Integration of Emersonian thought. II. The autonomy of moral experience. III. Idealism and perfectibility. IV. Theological dogmatism precludes perfectibility. V. Social value of heresy. VI. Social ethic in the North American Churches. VII. Its influence on inmigradas Churches. VIII. Solidarism.

Towards an ethic without dogma – I. The independence of morality. II. A free religious association. III. Societies of moral culture in the United States. IV. Some antecedents of English ethicism. V. The ethical churches. VI. The religious cult of morality. VII. Spontaneity and evolution of morality. VIII. Synthesis of ethicist thought. IX. The future of ethicism.

Ingenieros emphasizes the following main points: “I believe that from contemporary ethics four general conclusions can be inferred, independent of all dogmatism. They are not antecedent, but resulting from experience.

1. *The naturalness of ethics* – Moral experience develops naturally in human societies, as a necessary condition of the relationships between the individual and society.
2. *The autonomy of ethics* – Moral experience is not conditioned by revealed dogma neither by rational dogma, tending to emancipate itself of them in the future.
3. *The perfectibility of ethics* – Moral experience is not limited by revelation neither by reason, it is perfected as a function of social experience, tending to adapt to its incessantly variable and renewing conditions without ceasing the value judgments on which obligation and sanction are based.
4. *The sovereignty of ethics* – Life in society demands social obligation and the collective fulfillment of justice as a social sanction.

To explain in which way those principles are inferred from moral experience itself, I shall depart, deliberately, from the classic and textbook methods. I shall not be occupied with discussing doctrines, neither arguing with dialectic ability, not even exhibiting the impressive erudition with which mental hollowness is often filled.

I shall study, genetically, a given cycle of the moral experience: its apostle, the society in which it is effected, its immediate influence, the distant echo of its doctrines and their relationship with other similar contemporary doctrines. Thus, step by step, we shall follow the enunciated conclusions – naturalness, autonomy, perfectibility, and sovereignty of moral experience – take shape.”

MORAL FORCES

In *Las Fuerzas Morales*, written in 1925 (Fig. 2) and published posthumously, Ingenieros (1962b) ultimately states that he hopes to spur the young people on to discover their own ideals. One hundred maxims, in groups of three under the respective headings, are analyzed in the original book in a few paragraphs each. To our knowledge, this is the first English translation to be published of the maxims from *Las Fuerzas Morales*.

MORAL FORCES

1. Humanity is incessantly transmuted

OF YOUTH

2. Young are those who do not have a complicity with the past
3. Youth is the moral ferment of the people
4. The young sound the alarm to every generation

Advertencia del autor.

Los sermones diez reunidos en el punto ~~de~~ ~~fin~~ ~~para~~
publicados en revistas estudiantiles y juveniles, entre 1918 y 1923,
quince años seguidos de un nuevo aporte en ~~Tercera~~ América Latina
Apud ~~Universidad de Buenos Aires~~, ~~reimpresión~~ ~~propiedad~~ ~~de~~ ~~este~~ ~~autor~~,
de ~~esta~~ ~~obra~~ ~~se~~ ~~reedita~~ ~~este~~ ~~autor~~ ~~poniendo~~ ~~los~~ ~~con-~~
y coordina para ~~impresión~~ ~~incluir~~ ~~los~~ ~~elocuentes~~ ~~de~~ ~~el~~ ~~Pueblo~~ ~~y~~ ~~los~~ ~~sectores~~,
dirigidos por ~~el~~ ~~autor~~ ~~argentino~~.

Este libro completa la acción ~~de~~ ~~una~~ ~~ética~~
Funcional, ~~del~~ ~~autor~~ ~~en~~ ~~el~~ ~~libro~~ ~~"El~~ ~~Hombr~~ ~~Morales"~~, ~~o~~ ~~una~~
crítica de la moralidad; ~~"Hacia~~ ~~una~~ ~~moral~~ ~~sin~~ ~~dogmas"~~, ~~o~~
una ~~crítica~~ ~~de~~ ~~la~~ ~~moralidad~~, ~~"El~~ ~~libro~~ ~~de~~ ~~los~~ ~~valores~~,
una ~~antología~~ ~~de~~ ~~la~~ ~~moralidad~~, ~~una~~ ~~antología~~ ~~de~~ ~~los~~ ~~valores~~
en ~~todo~~ ~~un~~ ~~el~~ ~~concepto~~ ~~de~~ ~~un~~ ~~idealismo~~ ~~ético~~
~~en~~ ~~función~~ ~~de~~ ~~la~~ ~~experiencia~~ ~~social~~, ~~incompatible~~ ~~con~~ ~~los~~ ~~dogmas~~
antiguos ~~del~~ ~~idealismo~~ ~~reintegrados~~ ~~de~~ ~~la~~ ~~vigencia~~ ~~netifican~~
Cada generación ~~tiene~~ ~~que~~ ~~resolver~~ ~~por~~ ~~sí~~ ~~misma~~. Si ~~el~~ ~~libro~~ ~~puede~~
~~estimular~~ ~~a~~ ~~los~~ ~~jóvenes~~ ~~a~~ ~~desarrollar~~ ~~los~~ ~~propios~~, ~~que~~ ~~estarian~~ ~~salvados~~
los ~~autores~~ ~~del~~ ~~autor~~, ~~que~~ ~~siepre~~ ~~algún~~ ~~en~~ ~~la~~ ~~venta~~ ~~de~~ ~~la~~ ~~obra~~ ~~y~~
y ~~que~~ ~~se~~ ~~haya~~ ~~tenido~~ ~~la~~ ~~dicha~~ ~~de~~ ~~una~~ ~~subida~~ ~~de~~ ~~precio~~.

Buenos Aires, 1925
J. I.

Fig. 2. Last manuscript of Ingenieros, the 1925 preface to *Las Fuerzas Morales*.

OF ENTHUSIASM

5. Youth has to be enthusiastic and daring
6. Youth is terminated when it is extinguished of enthusiasm
7. Ideals give confidence to their own forces

OF ENERGY

8. Inertia opposed to life is cowardice
9. Thought is valued by the action it allows to develop
10. Juvenile energy creates the moral splendor of the people

OF WILL

11. After thinking, desire
12. The will proves itself in the action
13. Inactivity to desire generates fear to live

OF INITIATIVE

14. These are men who plow their own furrow
15. Free initiative allows to go ahead in the rest
16. Passive dependence is incompatible with dignity

OF WORK

17. The right to life is conditional upon the duty of work
18. Work is the emancipator of personality
19. The organization of work is the foundation of social harmony

OF SYMPATHY

20. Sympathizing is understanding
21. Sympathy is goodness in action
22. Understanding is a premise of justice

OF JUSTICE

23. Justice is the equilibrium between what is moral and what is right
24. Created interests obstruct justice
25. The righteous man avoids complicity in evil

OF SOLIDARITY

26. Solidarity is harmony that emerges from justice
27. Social imbalance generates violence
28. Solidarity grows in direct proportion to justice

OF INQUIETUDE

29. Intellectual pursuits reveal the seeds of renovation
30. Every renovation attempt leaves a favorable balance for society
31. The possible good is reached by looking for the better impossible

OF REBELLIOUSNESS

32. Rebelling is affirming a new ideal
33. The spirit of rebelliousness emancipates of dogmatic imperatives
34. Intellectual rebelliousness is eternal and creative

OF PERFECTION

35. In everything that exists act forces of perfection
36. Perfectibility is a privilege of youth
37. The road of perfection is living as if the ideal was reality

OF FIRMNESS

38. The service of an ideal must be rectilinear
39. Firmness is steel for the word and diamond for the conduct
40. The one who doubts his moral forces is won

OF DIGNITY

41. The young without moral path are noxious to society
42. It is not worth joining in the crumbs from the table of the powerful
43. Moral independence is the underpinning of dignity

OF DUTY

- 44. Moral forces converge in the sentiment of duty
- 45. Duty is a corollary of life in society
- 46. Passive obedience is the negation of duty

OF MERIT

- 47. Rank is only just a sanction of merit
- 48. Moral servitude is the price of the unjust rank
- 49. Merit can be measured by the resistances it causes

OF TIME

- 50. Valorizing time intensifies life
- 51. Each activity is a repose of others
- 52. Fecund action demands continuity in effort

OF STYLE

- 53. There is style in all forms that express a thought with loyalty
- 54. Mandatory correction is the negation of the original style
- 55. Originality is revealed in all forms of expression

OF GOODNESS

- 56. There is no kindness without active tension towards virtue
- 57. Goodness is no norm without action
- 58. Wherever injustice is diminished, goodness is augmented

OF MORAL

- 59. Morality renews itself as social experience
- 60. Dogmas are obstacles to moral perfection
- 61. In every renovation appear seeds of new morality

OF RELIGION

- 62. Collective beliefs are idealized in the function of culture
- 63. Morality is in reason the inverse of superstition
- 64. Faith is the passion of serving an ideal

OF TRUTH

- 65. The love for truth culminates among moral forces
- 66. Superstitions perpetuate hatred and injustice
- 67. Every moral progress is the triumph of a truth over a superstition

OF SCIENCE

- 68. The sciences are systems of truth each time less imperfect
- 69. Human knowledge unfolds as a function of experience
- 70. Scientific spirit excludes any principle of authority

OF THE IDEAL

- 71. Ethical ideals are a matter of perfection
- 72. Every idealist moral contains a prevision of the future
- 73. Perfectibility is an incessant renovation of ideals

OF EDUCATION

- 74. Education is the art of enabling man for social life
- 75. The free unfolding of vocations concurs with society
- 76. Social education must stimulate individual inequalities

OF SCHOOL

- 77. School is a bridge between home and society
- 78. School life must prepare for civic action
- 79. School does not fit in the narrow limits of the classroom

OF THE TEACHER

- 80. All human beings can teach others what they know
- 81. Educational interests must be conducted by educators themselves
- 82. Educational work implies the gravest social responsibility

OF HISTORY

- 83. Living history is a school of renovation
- 84. Each generation owes to rethink history
- 85. All future time will be better

OF PROGRESS

- 86. Social variation is the active work of thinking minorities
- 87. Social inheritance is passive resistance of the unconscious majorities
- 88. Progress is a result of the struggle between variation and inheritance

OF THE FUTURE

- 89. The present is the past of the future
- 90. The forgers of the future are fictitious
- 91. Nations without youth have no future

OF TERRAIN

- 92. Terrain is the motherland of the heart
- 93. True patriotism limits itself to the geographical horizon
- 94. Love for the terrain is a natural imperative

OF NATION

- 95. Nation is the motherland of civil life
- 96. National patriotism extends itself to the political horizon
- 97. Work and culture are the pillars of nationality

OF HUMANITY

98. Humanity is the motherland of the ideal
99. Human patriotism encompasses cultural horizon
100. Harmony of the people is the entelechy of humanity

POSTLUDE

During the 30 years of his exuberant productivity, between 1895 and 1925, Ingenieros cofounded with Ramos-Mejía, at the suggestion of de Veyga, and held the editorship of *Archivos de Criminología, Medicina Legal y Psiquiatría* from 1902 until 1913 (Ingenieros, 1914), founded and edited the *Revista de Filosofía* from 1915 until 1929 (Ingenieros & Ponce, 1999), and authored 47 books and 484 articles (Ingenieros, 1962c). His complete works (*Obras Completas*) were published in 1957 in 20 volumes by Elmer Editor in Buenos Aires (Ingenieros, 1957b) and in 1962 in 8 volumes by Mar Océano (Ingenieros, 1962c).

José Ingenieros succumbed to complications of meningitis on the morning of 31 October 1925 in his house in Buenos Aires. He was 48 years old. With this last act culminated his anticipated desire in *Las Fuerzas Morales*, “to have the happiness of dying before aging”.

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