

## THE DEBATE BETWEEN RAMOS AND URANGA: FROM THE “FEELING OF INFERIORITY” TO THE CONDITION OF “ONTOLOGICAL INSUFFICIENCY”

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**ABSTRACT:** This essay recovers the debate between Samuel Ramos and Emilio Uranga which took place at the series of conferences “The Mexican in Search of the Mexican” in 1951. In that debate, Uranga aims to show that the “feeling of inferiority” which Ramos attributes to the Mexican character in fact corresponds to a condition of “ontological insufficiency.” According to Ramos, the “feeling of inferiority” emerges from the cultural imitation through which a young nation like Mexico aims to reach the cultural maturity of Europe. For Uranga, on the contrary, the “feeling of inferiority” corresponds to a condition of “ontological insufficiency” which means that, given our condition of “accidental existence,” human beings are unable to embody the “substantial existence” that we attribute to values. Thus, the sense of “ontological insufficiency” is the authentic way in which human beings relate to values and the “feeling of inferiority” emerges because Mexicans attribute a substantial existence to European culture through which we measure ourselves. This essay aims to show that Uranga’s analysis regarding the condition of “ontological insufficiency” represents an effort to *liberate* Mexicans from the inauthentic way in which we relate to European as well as to our own Mexican culture.

**Keywords:** Mexican philosophy, Eurocentrism, accidentality, liberation.

**RESUMEN:** El presente ensayo recupera el debate entre Samuel Ramos y Emilio Uranga que tuvo lugar en la serie de conferencias “El Mexicano en Busca del Mexicano” en 1951. En aquel debate, Uranga se propone mostrar que el “sentimiento de inferioridad” que Ramos atribuye al mexicano en realidad corresponde a una “insuficiencia ontológica.” Para Ramos, el “sentimiento de inferioridad” emerge de la imitación cultural por medio de la cual la joven nación mexicana pretende alcanzar la madurez de la cultura europea. Para Uranga, por el contrario, el “sentimiento de inferioridad” corresponde a una “insuficiencia ontológica” la cual implica que, dada nuestra condición de

“accidentalidad existencial,” los seres humanos somos incapaces de alcanzar la “existencia substancial” que atribuimos a los valores. Así, la “insuficiencia ontológica” es la manera auténtica en que los seres humanos nos relacionamos con los valores y el “sentimiento de inferioridad” emerge porque el mexicano atribuye una “existencia substancial” a la cultura europea frente a la cual se compara. El presente ensayo pretende mostrar que el análisis de Uranga sobre la “insuficiencia ontológica” representa un esfuerzo por *liberar* al mexicano de la manera inauténtica en que se relaciona tanto con la cultura europea como con la propia cultura mexicana.

**Keywords:** filosofía del mexicano, eurocentrismo, accidentalidad, liberación.

## I. Introduction

The following essay recovers the debate between Samuel Ramos (1897-1959) and Emilio Uranga (1921-1988) which took place in 1951 at the series of conferences titled “The Mexican in Search of the Mexican” at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM in Spanish). Recovering this debate is important not only for historical reasons, but also because, as I aim to show in the following, the debate offers an alternative to the Eurocentric ideal of humanity that emerged during the colonization of the Americas. At the series of conferences, Ramos presented the essay “Entorno a las ideas del mexicano” [“Regarding some Ideas about Mexicans”] and Uranga presented “Notas para el estudio del mexicano” [“Notes for the Study of Mexicans”]. The debate between Ramos and Uranga regards whether the Mexican character is marked by the “feeling of inferiority” which Ramos proposes, or by the condition of “ontological insufficiency” as Uranga suggests. I aim to show that Uranga’s analysis about the condition of “ontological insufficiency” represents an effort to *liberate* Mexicans from the inauthentic way in which we relate to European as well as to our own Mexican culture.

Ramos’s analysis regarding the “feeling of inferiority” in his canonical *The Profile of Man and Culture in Mexico* (1934) is historically important because it is the first systematic attempt to explain the imitative attitude towards European culture that Antonio Caso attributed to the Mexican intelligentsia. Caso referred to this imitative attitude as “national Bovarism,” which consists in conceiving of ourselves as different from what we are. In the Adlerian analysis that Ramos proposes, the “feeling of inferiority” emerges during childhood from the discrepancy between what we are and what we aspire to become. Such that, if the aspiration exceeds our individual capacities, we will interpret our reality as

*inferior* to what we aim to become. According to Ramos, this phenomenon captures the imitative attitude between Mexican and European culture. The “feeling of inferiority” emerges from the imitative effort through which the young Mexican nation aims to reach the cultural maturity of Europe.

In contrast, Uranga argues that the “feeling of inferiority” in fact corresponds to what he refers to as a condition of “ontological insufficiency.” In his *magnum opus*, *Análisis del ser del mexicano* (1952) [*Analysis of Mexican Being*], Uranga situates the Mexican ontological-existential condition between a mode of “accidental existence,” which implies that Mexican existence lacks a given meaning, and a mode of “substantial existence,” which is the mode of existence that we attribute to values such as *friendship*. For Uranga, the condition of “ontological insufficiency” means that, given our accidental mode of existence, human beings are unable to embody the substantial mode of existence that we attribute to values. Although we adopt them as life-projects, human beings are unable to embody values such as *friendship* in a substantial way. Thus, the condition of “ontological insufficiency” is the *authentic* way in which human beings relate to values and the “feeling of inferiority” emerges because Mexicans attribute a substantial mode of existence to European culture through which we measure ourselves.

What I aim to show in the following is that Uranga’s analysis regarding the condition of “ontological insufficiency” represents an effort to *liberate* Mexicans from the inauthentic way in which we relate both to European as well as to our own Mexican culture. To substantiate this thesis, in the first section, I read Ramos’s analysis about the “feeling of inferiority” through Leopoldo Zea’s analysis of the situation of colonial dependency. This reading aims to explain the “feeling of inferiority” as emerging from the Eurocentric ideal of humanity rather than through the developmental psychology that Ramos proposes. In the second section, I introduce Uranga’s analysis about the condition of “ontological insufficiency” in opposition to the normative ideal of humanity that elevates European culture as the substantial embodiment of the human. In the third section, I recover the debate between Ramos and Uranga to show that Uranga’s analysis of “ontological insufficiency” represents an effort to *liberate* Mexicans from the Eurocentric ideal of humanity. I end by proposing that Uranga’s radical humanism represents an alternative to the Eurocentric humanism which negates the humanity of those who do not fit the ideal.

## II. From the “Feeling of Inferiority” to the Situation of “Colonial Dependency”

This section offers a reading of Ramos's analysis of the "feeling of inferiority" from the point of view of Leopoldo Zea's analysis of colonial dependency. I aim to show that, despite his historical importance, Ramos interprets the "feeling of inferiority" as part of the psychological development of a young nation like Mexico. For this reason, Ramos fails to criticize the Eurocentric ideal of humanity as a normative idea which situates formerly colonized peoples within the situation that Zea calls colonial dependency. As we shall see in the following, Zea's analysis of the normative idea of humanity is important to frame Uranga's discussion regarding the authentic and inauthentic ways in which Mexicans relate both to European culture as well as to our own Mexican culture.

The historical importance of Ramos's analysis regarding the "feeling of inferiority" lies in having offered the first systematic explanation of the *imitative attitude* that Antonio Caso referred to as "national Bovarism" (Caso 1922: 75-82). As in the case of Madame Bovary from Flaubert's novel, Caso argues that "national Bovarism" consists in the ability of the Mexican intelligentsia of "conceiving of oneself as different from what one is" (79). Caso employs this expression to capture the *imitative attitude* of the Mexican intelligentsia of adopting foreign values and philosophical systems such as positivism to solve the problems that emerge from Mexico's social reality. This means that, in Caso's view, the adoption of values and philosophical systems corresponds to an effort of transforming Mexico's social reality according to foreign values, instead of employing values that emerge from the social reality itself.

Ramos explains the imitative attitude that Caso attributes to the Mexican intelligentsia by employing Alfred Adler's analysis of the "inferiority complex." Ramos writes that, in Adler's analysis, "the inferiority complex appears in a child as soon as he recognizes the insignificance of his own strength compared to the strength of his parents" (Ramos 1962 [1934]: 56). In Ramos's view, this means that the feeling of inferiority is part of the psychological development of the individual and that it emerges from the discrepancy between what we are and what we aim to become. Thus, if what we aim to become exceeds our individual capacities, we will experience our individual reality as *inferior* vis-à-vis that to which we aspire. Ramos puts it as follows: "if the existing gap between what he wants to do and what he is able to do is great, he will undoubtedly fail... from that moment on he will have no self-confidence; in short, a sense of inferiority will grow in his mind" (6).

Ramos's analysis regarding the Mexican character extrapolates from Adler's individual developmental psychology to social psychology to attribute the feeling of inferiority to Mexican culture. This means that Ramos interprets Mexican culture's imitative attitude towards European culture as part of the psychological development of a young nation such as Mexico. For this reason, Ramos argues that the feeling of inferiority emerged during the Conquest and, even more so, during the Mexican Independence:

It seems to me that the sentiment of inferiority in our race has a historical origin which must be sought in the areas of the Conquest and Colonization. But it did not really begin to manifest itself until the time of the Independence movement, when the country had to define its own national physiognomy. Being an extremely young nation, it attempted—overnight—to reach the level of traditional European civilization. It was then the conflict broke out between ambition and the limits of natural capacity. The solution seemed to be imitation of Europe, its ideas and its institutions, creating thereby certain collective fictions which, when we have interpreted them as fact, have artificially solved our psychological conflict. (13)

In Ramos's interpretation, Mexicans adopt European values and institutions in an effort to reach the cultural maturity of Europe. However, given its condition of being a young nation, the aspiration exceeds Mexican reality, which leads Mexicans to consider our own reality as *inferior* vis-à-vis the European culture according to which we measure ourselves. As such, in Ramos's analysis, the feeling of inferiority emerges from the inability of the young Mexican nation to reach the cultural maturity of Europe.

The historical importance of Ramos's analysis regarding the feeling of inferiority from which Mexicans suffer is evident because it gave rise to a series of studies about Mexican culture among which the most prominent is Octavio Paz's *The Labyrinth of Solitude* (1950). Despite its historical importance, however, Ramos explains the feeling of inferiority in terms of the psychological development of Mexico, which entails that Ramos establishes a paternalistic relation between Mexican and European culture. The issue is not only that this kind of paternalistic reasoning served as the moral justification for the colonization of the Americas, but also that Ramos fails to articulate the critique of Eurocentrism that thinkers from the following generation such as Leopoldo Zea carried out.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For more about how the developmental thesis served as the moral justification for the conquest of the Americas, see Enrique Dussel's analysis regarding the "developmental fallacy" (Dussel 1995: 66-67).

In *La filosofía americana como filosofía sin más* (1969) [*American Philosophy as Philosophy as Such*], Zea argues that the colonization of the Americas led Europe to formulate the problem regarding the normative ideal of humanity, which would then serve to define both the humanity of European as well as non-European peoples. The problem, according to Zea, is that Europe came to define its own humanity in *negative* relation vis-à-vis the humanity of non-European peoples, which entailed the effective negation of the latter's humanity. In this way, Europe raises itself as the embodiment of the normative ideal of humanity *par excellence*:

Europe considered that its destiny, the destiny of its peoples, was to make of its own humanism the archetype to be reached by any entity who looked alike; this Europe, as much Christian as modern, by transcending the confines of its geography and stumbling with other entities who seemed to be human beings, demanded them to justify their hypothetical humanity. That is, [Europe] put into question the possibility of such justification if it was not accompanied by proofs that they [non-European peoples] were not only alike but were also copies, duplicates, mirrors of what Europe considered as the human *par excellence*. (1969: 11-12, my translation)

Time and time again, Zea continues, the demand that non-European peoples should prove their humanity according to Eurocentric standards served to justify colonial enterprises. Moreover, what Zea calls the situation of colonial dependency consists not only in Europe judging non-European peoples according to its Eurocentric ideal of humanity, but also in that non-European peoples come to judge ourselves according to the Eurocentric standard. The situation of colonial dependency thus consists in the effort by non-European peoples to embody the Eurocentric ideal of humanity. As Zea puts it, "becoming Christian, European, or Western will be the goals to be reached [by non-European peoples] in order to end the bargaining, the suspension [of their humanity]" (15). As such, Mexican culture's imitative attitude towards European culture should be explained in terms of the Eurocentric ideal of humanity that emerged during colonization, rather than as part of a developmental psychological process as Ramos proposes. Zea's analysis of the situation of colonial dependency is important for framing Uranga's analysis about the condition of "ontological insufficiency" as an effort to *liberate* Mexicans from the inauthentic way in which we relate to European as well as to our own Mexican culture.

### III. Mexican “Accidentality” and the Condition of “Ontological Insufficiency”

The foregoing section thus shows that Mexican culture’s imitative attitude towards Europe should be explained in terms of the Eurocentric ideal of humanity as a normative idea rather than through Ramos’s developmental psychological analysis. In this section, I show that Zea’s analysis of the Eurocentric ideal of humanity can help in framing Emilio Uranga’s analysis regarding the condition of “ontological insufficiency” as the authentic way in which human beings relate to normative ideas or values such as *friendship*. Thus, in Uranga’s view, the authentic human condition is one of “accidental existence” and inauthenticity emerges when we attribute, either to ourselves or others, a condition of “substantial existence.”

In *Analysis of Mexican Being*, Uranga offers an ontological-existential analysis to explain psychological traits such as the feeling of inferiority that thinkers such as Ramos attribute to Mexican culture. That Uranga’s analysis aims to directly challenge Ramos’s thesis is clear from the opening pages of *Analysis of Mexican Being*:

In a previous essay dedicated to the ontology of the Mexican, we *have sought to define a certain constitutional insufficiency in our manner of being*; at the same time we have discussed a project, first studied excellently by Samuel Ramos, of elevating insufficiency over and above the so-called complex of inferiority. (2021 [1952]: 103)

Uranga’s ontological-existential analysis adopts the concepts of “substance” and “accident” from the metaphysical tradition. However, while the metaphysical tradition understands “substance” as what something is regardless of the mind who knows it, and “accident” as that which is contingent to what the object is, Uranga interprets these concepts in an existential way. Uranga interprets “accident” as a mode of existence between the poles of being and nothingness, as “lacking in foundation” or “minus being,” and he interprets “substance” as “plenitude” or “fullness of being” (103-104). This means that Uranga interprets accident as that which lacks existential justification, or as lacking a given meaning, and he interprets substance as that whose existential justification is necessary, or that cannot be a different way.

Precisely, in Uranga’s analysis, psychological traits such as the feeling of inferiority find their ultimate explanation in the condition of accidental existence. That is, given that Mexican existence lacks existential justification, Mexican peoples project normative ideas or *values* such as *friendship* through which we aim to endow our existence with substance, thereby providing a

justification for our human lives. The substantial existence that we attribute to values thus corresponds to the effort of escaping our accidental condition. In his essay “Ensayo de una ontología del mexicano” [“Essay on an Ontology of Mexicans”] (1951), Uranga puts it thus:

Individuals who have projected a world, and who have realized it, eventually turn their gaze toward the foundations or grounds of those constructions, and upon finding them in the imagination are thrown into an incurable uneasiness, into an inevitable restlessness of finding the human edifice built on contemptible grounds. (2017 [1951]: 172)

Uranga’s argument in this passage is twofold. On the one hand, Uranga argues that Mexicans project values such as *friendship* through which we aim to endow our existence with substance. This means that Mexicans aim to embody the normative idea of being a *good friend* to endow our lives with meaning. On the other hand, Uranga argues that Mexicans also realize that the values we project find their ground in “*naderías*” or “nothings,” that is, in our lack of existential justification (172). This means not only that the substantial existence we attribute to values depends on our condition of accidentality, but also that, given our condition of accidentality, Mexicans are unable to embody the substantial existence that we attribute to values.

What Uranga calls “ontological insufficiency,” which characterizes Mexican existence, thus consists in that, given our existential condition of accidentality, Mexicans are unable to embody the substantial mode of existence that we attribute to values. In this way, ontological insufficiency is the *authentic* way in which Mexicans relate to values, and inauthentic is to think that we can embody values in a substantial way.<sup>2</sup> Thinking that we can embody values in a substantial way implies conceiving of oneself as the embodiment of the normative idea of *friendship*, for example, which would in fact lead us to abandoning friendship as a life-project. Similarly, the feeling of inferiority implies assuming that *others* embody values in a substantial way, which leads us to interpret our *insufficiency* as *inferiority* vis-à-vis others. In *Analysis of Mexican Being*, Uranga writes that “sufficiency and insufficiency represents an ‘immanent’ or ‘intrinsic’ value scale. But if we compare Mexican culture with

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<sup>2</sup> Uranga writes that “Inauthenticity would be to fee the condition of accidentality and to substantialize oneself; the Mexican person falls into this temptation almost by necessity when her originary constitution is ‘too much to bear.’ That ‘sufficiency’ toward which we aspire cannot be a ‘substantiality’ but a sufficiency that emerges from the same insufficiency, an emergence that is the only legitimate and properly moral goal, as we will show later” (2021 [1952]: 105-106).



European culture, if we look for an ‘extrinsic’ criterion of valuation, the problem of ‘superiority’ and ‘inferiority’ is automatically introduced” (2021 [1952]: 140). Ontological insufficiency is thus the authentic way of relating to values and the feeling of inferiority emerges because we compare ourselves to European culture to which we attribute, in an inauthentic way, a substantial mode of existence.

With Uranga’s analysis about the ontological insufficiency that characterizes the existential condition of Mexicans, we can now return to the analysis about the situation of colonial dependency that Zea proposes. In Uranga’s view, contrary to ontological insufficiency as the authentic way of relating to values, European humanism presents itself as the substantial embodiment of humanity. This implies that Eurocentrism is an *inauthentic* way of relating to the normative idea of humanity. Indeed, when addressing the question of whether his analysis regarding the accidentality of Mexican life corresponds to human beings in general and not only to Mexicans, Uranga argues that “*we are not very certain of the existence of the human being in general and, second, that whatever passes itself off as human being in general, namely, generalized European humanity, does not appear to us to define itself as accidental, but precisely as arrogant substantiality*” (2021 [1952]: 107). Moreover, the problem that Zea proposes regarding the situation of colonial dependency is not only that Europe presents itself as the substantial embodiment of the human, but also that Mexicans learn to judge ourselves through the Eurocentric ideal of humanity. In this sense, the feeling of inferiority which emerges from the situation of colonial dependency represents an inauthentic way of relating both to European humanity as well as to our own Mexican humanity.

#### **IV. From the Feeling of Inferiority to Ontological Insufficiency**

I have thus shown that whereas ontological insufficiency implies that human beings are incapable of embodying normative ideals or values, the feeling of inferiority implies assuming that European culture embodies the normative idea of humanity in a substantial way. In this last section, I recover the debate between Ramos and Uranga to show that the analysis of ontological insufficiency that the latter proposes represents an effort to *liberate* Mexicans from the *inauthentic* way of relating both to European as well as to our own Mexican culture. I end this essay by arguing that Uranga’s radical humanism represents an alternative to the Eurocentric humanism which emerged during the colonization of the Americas.

The debate between Ramos and Uranga can be found in their respective essays “Entorno a las ideas del mexicano” [“Regarding some Ideas about Mexicans”] and “Notas para un estudio del mexicano” [“Notes for the study of Mexicans”], which were published in *Cuadernos Americanos* in 1951. The central points of the debate are three. The first is a methodological point because it regards the conceptual apparatus that both Ramos and Uranga employ in their respective analyses. Ramos criticizes Uranga for adopting a ready-made ontology such as existential ontology and applying it to the Mexican case. Ramos argues that Uranga should “make an ontology that emerges from Mexicans, rather than subsuming Mexicans into a ready-made ontology, only to prove it correct” (1951: 113, my translation). Uranga’s response is to be expected: “when we apply to Mexicans the complex of inferiority ‘we fall into the illusion of finding in Mexicans what was already present in the philosophy,’ in Adler’s doctrine, is irrelevant, but if ontology wants to do the same then it gets carried away” (2013 [1951]: 142, my translation). Uranga’s response is thus that Ramos adopts a standard of originality that he is not willing to apply to his Adlerian analysis of Mexicans.

In my view, the second point of the debate regards the central difference between Ramos and Uranga. In “Notas para un estudio del mexicano,” Uranga clarifies that the feeling of inferiority entails inauthenticity and that ontological insufficiency is the authentic Mexican condition. Uranga puts it as follows:

The complex of inferiority is one of the modalities that the insufficiency of the Mexican being might take, but not the most authentic, as we have previously observed. The complex of inferiority is a behavior that responds to the demands of existential autonomy, where one throws oneself to the arms of others so that they might give us the solution that we cannot find for ourselves... The Mexican who experiences inferiority displays [*acentúa*] in his being what it means ‘to seek shelter’ [*arrimo*]. She displays the ‘relation of dependency’ [*vínculo de dependencia*] that inhabits her being. She cannot give meaning to her life but seeks it in others. (2013 [1951]: 139, my translation)

In the first section of this essay, we saw that, in Zea’s analysis, the situation of colonial dependency does not only entail that European humanism affirms itself as the embodiment of the normative idea of humanity, but also that non-European peoples learn to judge ourselves according to the Eurocentric standard. Uranga’s argument here is precisely that the feeling of inferiority entails attributing to European culture a condition of substantial existence. On the one hand, this solves for Mexicans the issue of giving meaning to our human

existence, since we derive our existential meaning from the European culture to which we aspire. On the other hand, however, the feeling of inferiority also implies judging ourselves according to the Eurocentric ideal of humanity. For this reason, Uranga refers to the feeling of inferiority as idolatry: “implicit in [the feeling of] inferiority there is idolatry; a will to attribute to others an absolutely justified [mode of] existence” (2013 [1951]: 123, my translation). This is to say that, for Uranga, the feeling of inferiority entails an inauthentic way of relating to European culture, to which we attribute a substantial mode of existence, as well as to Mexican culture, which derives its existential justification from imitating Europe.

Lastly, the third point of the debate between Ramos and Uranga regards the actual condition of Mexicans. Ramos argues that whereas his analysis about the feeling of inferiority captures the *real* way in which contemporary Mexicans are, Uranga’s analysis of ontological insufficiency represents the *ideal* to which Mexicans should aspire. In Ramos’s words, “if our aim is to know how Mexicans are, and not, for now, how they should be, it seems to me that my observation is correct. Therefore, there is in Uranga a certain confusion between the real Mexican and the ideal Mexican” (1951: 112, my translation). It is worth quoting Uranga’s response at length:

That what is real about Mexicans is their inferiority and what is ideal is their insufficiency does not seem to me to be the correct formula, because insufficiency is as real as inferiority, and just as ideal is the first as the second, depending on how we look at it. Being inferior is an ideal for many Mexicans. They have made it their goal and they have achieved it; they remain in their inferiority even though they perceive it as such. The feeling of inferiority solves for them many problems. It rules their lives. I do not know why we should say that it is not an ideal, since it has all the characteristics of what ought to be [*deber ser*]. Insufficiency, on the contrary, does not seem to be an ideal, but what is real. Given the insufficiency of our being, we have chosen inferiority. What is ideal here is inferiority. Ramos believes that Mexicans are ‘really’ inferior, and only ‘ideally’ insufficient, whereas I believe that they are ‘really’ insufficient and only ‘ideally’ inferior. (2013 [1951]: 140, my translation)

Uranga’s point is that what appears to Ramos as a psychological behavior at the surface level finds its ultimate explanation in the existential condition of ontological insufficiency. It is when Mexicans confront the accidentality of our existence that we attribute a substantial mode of existence to European culture, thereby projecting for ourselves an ideal to be reached. For this reason, Uranga

argues that insufficiency is the real and inferiority is the ideal condition that characterizes Mexicans. The problem, for Uranga, is not only that inferiority is an inauthentic way of confronting our accidental existence, but also that it maintains the situation of colonial dependency between Mexican and European culture. In this sense, Uranga's *liberatory* project consists in divesting human existence, both Mexican and European, from substantiality. This means renouncing the view that some subset of humans can arrogate for themselves what it means to be human and, instead, embracing ontological insufficiency as our authentic human condition. In this way, Uranga continues, substantiality turns into a form of "sufficiency that emerges from our own insufficiency" (42, my translation). Differently put, Uranga breaks with the situation of colonial dependency by divesting European humanity from substantiality, thereby also making Mexicans the measure of our own humanity.

If, in Zea's analysis, the situation of colonial dependency entails not only that European culture raises itself as the embodiment of the human *par excellence*, but also that non-European peoples learn to judge ourselves from the Eurocentric perspective, Uranga's analysis of ontological insufficiency represents an effort to *liberate* Mexicans from colonial dependency.<sup>3</sup> For Uranga, however, this does not mean simply replacing one embodiment of the ideal of humanity from one subset of humans to another, which would replace the terms but not the situation of colonial dependency.<sup>4</sup> Rather, Uranga's project consists in a radical rejection of the view that humanity has a substantial meaning, whatever that might be, because this leads to negating the humanity of those who do not fit the mold. In this sense, whereas Eurocentric humanism results in the dehumanization of non-European peoples, Uranga's humanism affirms the concrete human as the measure of humanity.

## V. Conclusion

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<sup>3</sup> Carlos Alberto Sánchez offers a similar interpretation of Uranga's project when he writes as follows: "Ultimately, the task of transformation demands liberation from a previous order that holds one 'hostage' to its 'a priori ideals.' These are the ideas that elevate substantial being as the measure of all things, refuse the value of contingency and accidentality, limit the normative value of non-European forms of life, devalue emotion and the body as the source of knowledge, and, in general, restrict the scope of the philosophical to the European historical model; these are those ideals to which one is seemingly, and automatically, tied upon one's birth, and transformation means breaking that tie, seeking a new order" (2019: 74).

<sup>4</sup> Paulo Freire captures this point when he writes that, "Their [that of the oppressed] idea is to be men; but for them to be men is to be oppressors. This is their model of humanity" (2011 [1970]: 45).

The foregoing aims to show that recovering the debate between Ramos and Uranga is important not only for historical reasons, but also because it offers us an alternative to the Eurocentric ideal of humanity which emerged during colonization and that continues informing the lives of formerly colonized peoples such as Mexicans. I aimed to show that, for Uranga, the condition of ontological insufficiency is the authentic way in which human beings relate to normative ideas or values, and that the feeling of inferiority emerges because Mexicans attribute a substantial mode of existence to European culture, according to which we measure ourselves. In this sense, I argued that Uranga's analysis of ontological insufficiency represents an effort to *liberate* Mexicans from the inauthentic way of relating to European as well as to our own Mexican culture. I end this paper by proposing that Uranga's radical humanism offers an alternative to the Eurocentric humanism which dehumanizes those who do not fit its mold.

I would like to show that what characterizes Uranga's radical humanism is what he calls a cynical inversion of values. Uranga distinguishes cynicism as an attitude towards values from other attitudes such as *resentment* and *hypocrisy*. While resentment entails an attitude that limits itself to *devaluing* what we exalted without affirming alternative values, hypocrisy entails a false submission to the values we exalt to later devalue them (2021 [1952]: 146-147). In contrast, Uranga argues that cynicism goes beyond hypocrisy because cynicism renounces the hypocritical submission by revaluing those values that we considered inferior:

Cynicism is, according to our definition, *the conscious acceptance of an inversion of values*. The cynic boasts of being plebian, a 'pelado.' The cynic places the low over the noble, ruin over splendor... In cynicism, man puts himself as the final judge regarding the management of the hierarchy of values; he decides whether they go 'upward or downward,' or are put 'on their head.' In cynicism, 'inferiority,' appropriated as 'insufficiency,' is presented as 'superior' and 'sufficient.' (146)

Differently put, Uranga's radical humanism thus consists in the revalorizing the concrete human being and in devaluing European culture as the substantial embodiment of the human. Yet, the project of revalorizing the concrete human seems to lead to the paradox that, although Uranga rejects the project regarding the Mexican being which leads to *nationalism* that would affirm one's own humanity in isolation from others, Uranga also argues that, "*it is better to begin with the being of the Mexican in order to illuminate from that being what will be called man in general or the essence of man*" (137). The paradox that Uranga's

argument presents regards whether affirming the concrete human being would lead to a false generalization which would lead to a Mexico-centrism that would present itself as the new model of the human.

However, the paradox that emerges from Uranga's proposal becomes productive when we consider that, in Uranga's analysis, what characterizes the Mexican being does not consist in *possessing* such or such quality, whatever that might be, which would give a fixed meaning to our human existence. Rather, according to Uranga, what characterizes Mexicans is precisely our *lack of existential justification*, or our lack of fixed meaning. This existential lack leads Mexicans not only to project values that would endow our lives with meaning, but it also leads us to open ourselves to the humanity of others. Uranga puts it as follows:

This peculiar 'courage' or 'clarity' to open up to the 'misfortune' or 'abandonment' of the human lot is the originary model for opening oneself to that which is human, to that most subterranean sphere in which has been prepared a sense that must be communicated, through compassion, sympathy, or affinity, to others, to all things that intend to pass themselves off as human. (127-128)

While Eurocentric humanism takes a general sense of the human to then apply it to concrete humans, Uranga's alternative humanism entails that, if we take as a point of departure the concrete human, we will stumble upon a radical lack of meaning, which is precisely what we share with other human beings. Luis Villoro expresses this productive paradox when he writes that, in Uranga's view, "the deepest nucleus of culture is such that it expresses universal characteristics applicable to all humans" (2021 [1990]: 26). In short, beyond a Eurocentric humanism which effectively negates the humanity of those who do not fit the mold, and a nationalism which affirms one's humanity in isolation from others, Uranga's radical humanism entails affirming each human being as the concrete expression of a lack of existential justification and, as such, as the concrete expression of what is authentically human.

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