The Review of Politics 87 (2025), 193–217.

doi:10.1017/S0034670524000688

Liberalism in Two Worlds: José Victorino Lastarria on John Stuart Mill

Cristian Pérez-Muñoz
University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida, USA

Abstract: During the nineteenth century, liberalism played a fundamental role in the newly formed Latin American nation-states. Yet little attention has been paid to how liberal thinkers on the periphery reacted against liberal theories suffused with pro-colonial rhetoric and Eurocentric bias. This study examines the underexplored reaction of José Victorino Lastarria to John Stuart Mill's liberal project. Lastarria, one of the most influential nineteenth-century Latin American liberals, critically engaged with Mill's liberalism, discerning there an example of Eurocentrism that missed insights from the republican Latin American experience. This article examines the intellectual connections and disconnections between Mill's liberalism, representing the imperial metropole, and Lastarria's thought, a form of liberalism in the newly independent peripheral states. By reconstructing his discussion of Mill, this article presents Lastarria's main political ideas to a broader audience.

The nineteenth century witnessed the flourishing of liberal projects in various corners of the world. Although the pivotal influence of European thinkers during that period is undeniable, liberals from peripheral settings did more than repeat and translate recipes dictated by French or British intellectuals.[1] As citizens of former colonies who saw themselves as part of the Western political thought tradition, Latin American liberals incorporated and transformed liberalism to contest the colonial legacy and the threats of authoritarian rule from a radically different vantage point than their European counterparts.

Cristian Pérez-Muñoz is assistant profession in the Department of Political Science at University of Florida, 234 Anderson Hall, Gainesville, FL 32611-7325, USA (cperezmunoz@ufl.edu).

[1]See Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798–1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); and Christopher Bayly, *Recovering Liberties: Indian Thought in the Age of Liberalism and Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

This article contributes to the debate on the liberalisms of the periphery by examining how José Victorino Lastarria (1817–88), one of the most influential Latin American nineteenth-century liberals, confronted, contested, and incorporated elements of John Stuart Mill's liberalism. Mill's work is an inevitable reference point for discussions on the limits of state actions, the nature of individual freedom, and the characteristics of representative government. It has been widely reported by scholars such as Uday Mehta,[2] Margaret Kohn and Daniel O'Neill,[3] Jennifer Pitts,[4] and Duncan Bell[5] that Mill endorsed and justified colonialist and imperialist practices. These authors point out inconsistencies in his liberalism inasmuch as he defended and advocated British colonialism. Lastarria employed Mill's ideas as a basis for both critiquing and expanding liberal theories but did so with a focus on the specific challenges and perspectives of Latin American postcolonial societies. He condemned colonial institutions and practices and elaborated on the nature of liberal institutions. Like Mill, he thought of himself as a liberal. From Mill's logic and analysis of Comte to Mill's ideas on freedom and the institutional design of representative institutions, the British philosopher was a source of ideas for Lastarria.

Nonetheless, the historical and theoretical literature has overlooked Mill's influence on the Chilean thinker.[6] There are at least three reasons for this omission. First, Lastarria did not mention Mill as one of his central intellectual influences. Second, Lastarria's engagement with Mill is disorganized and consequently hard to synthesize. He discusses Mill's ideas in two of his

[2]Uday Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth-Century British Liberal Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

[3]Margaret Kohn and Daniel O'Neill, "A Tale of Two Indias: Burke and Mill on Empire and Slavery in the West Indies and America," *Political Theory* 34, no. 2 (2006): 192–228.

[4]Jennifer Pitts, *A Turn to Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

[5]Duncan Bell, *Reordering the World: Essays on Liberalism and Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016).

[6]Simon Collier, *Chile: The Making of a Republic, 1830–1865: Politics and Ideas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Ricardo Donoso, *Las ideas políticas en Chile* (Santiago: Fundación de Cultura Económica, 1946); Iván Jaksić and Sol Serrano, "El gobierno y las libertades: La ruta del liberalismo chileno en el siglo XIX," in *Liberalismo y poder: Latinoamérica en el siglo* XIX, ed. Iván Jaksić and Eduardo Posada (Santiago: FCE, 2011), 177–206. For a brief discussion of the European influences (e.g,. Benjamin Constant, Henri Ahrens, Emile Littre, Auguste Comte, Alexis de Tocqueville, Jean Gustave Courcelle Senuil, and John Stuart Mill) in Lastarria's philosophy see Cristina Hurtado. "Lastarria y la filosofía europea en el siglo XIX en Chile," *Cuadernos del pensamiento Latinoamericano* 17 (2009): 254–65. According to Hurtado, Mill influenced Lastarria's understanding of knowledge and utilitarian philosophy.

later works, *La América*[7] and *Lecciones de política positiva.*[8] The former dedicates a section to Mill which becomes the focus of Leopoldo Zea's brief analysis of this subject.[9] However, while the discussion of Mill in *La América* is concentrated in one chapter, the presence of the British philosopher in *Lecciones de política positiva* is pervasive and not always adequately referenced. Finally, most of the academic literature on Lastarria comes from disciplines such as history, cultural, and legal studies. Although rich and varied, Lastarria's political thought has been largely unexplored by political theorists. Aside from his political and methodological controversies with Andres Bello and Domingo Faustino Sarmiento regarding alternative approaches to writing and studying history,[10] his political studies remain mostly unexplored.

Lastarria's ideas were embedded in the broader discourse of both European and Latin American liberalism at the time. Despite this, his distinct combination of key concepts sets him apart from other liberals of the period. Lastarria opposed restricted suffrage and plural voting, recognized the virtues of the indigenous populations, criticized colonialism, and defended a philosophical approach to history that transcends the narrative methods of historical writing. He supported self-government, emphasized the transformative power of political institutions, and stressed the importance of law as a pedagogical tool for promoting individual freedom.

The interest in Lastarria's societal and political conceptualization does not come from its novelty compared to European models and thinkers but from his exploration of crucial political theory questions during the post-independence period, a time when he was in dialogue with other thinkers addressing similar pressing issues. Lastarria engaged with some of the most important Latin American intellectuals of his time who also (in one way or another) explored the circumstances and political options for postcolonial societies.[11] Analyzing his perspective also sheds light on the hemispheric discussion of societal and political structures and processes

[7]Jose Victorino Lastarria, *La América.* In *Obras completas de Don J. V. Lastarria* (Edición Oficial, vol. 9. Santiago de Chile: Imprenta Barcelona, [1965] 1909).

[8]Jose Victorino Lastarria, *Lecciones de Política Positiva.* Santiago, In *Obras Completas de Don J. V. Lastarria.* (Edición Oficial, vol. 2. Santiago de Chile, Imprenta Barcelona, [1875] 1909).

[9]Leopoldo Zea, *El Pensamiento Latinoamericano* (Mexico City: Editorial Pormaca, 1965), 228–34.

[10]Allen Woll, *A Functional Past: The Uses of History in Nineteenth-Century Chile* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1982); Iván Jaksić, *El debate fundacional: Los orígenes de la historiografía chilena* (Santiago: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2021).

[11]This is the case of his interactions and discussions with thinkers such as Domingo Faustino Sarmiento (1811–88), Andres Bello (1871–1865), Juan Bautista Alberdi (1810–84), Jose Maria Samper (1828–88), and Florentino Gonzalez (1805–74), among others.

during a period of critical political change in the postcolonial era of the continent.[12]

The contributions of this article are twofold. First, it examines the intellectual connections and disconnections between Mill's liberalism, representing the imperial metropole, and Lastarria's, a form of liberalism in the newly independent peripheral states. Lastarria molded his liberalism to a significant extent by contextualizing and situating Mill's political thought. Lastarria offered a particular version of liberalism conceived through the lens of the post-independence experience. Second, by reconstructing his discussion of Mill, this article presents Lastarria's main ideas on the nature of freedom, the state, and government to a broader audience. In Lastarria's liberalism, freedom and law are inseparable, republican "semecratic" government is the only institutional arrangement apt to promote freedom, and restricted and plural voting schemes are unjustified. In his view, representative government needs to be conceived as a regime to promote freedom and eliminate distinctions and artificial hierarchies among citizens. In the name of political sovereignty and the principle of equality before the law, general suffrage must be granted to all independent citizens, regardless of their level of wealth or intellectual capacity. However, in contrast to Mill, Lastarria believed that, based on society's current norms, the right to vote should not yet be extended to women. Instead, suffrage as a political condition and right would come about as societal progression altered women's status.

Section 1 contextualizes Lastarria as a case of liberalism on the periphery. Section 2 describes Lastarria's background. The third section presents his main ideas on the nature of freedom and his analysis of Mill's interpretation of the same subject. Section 4 discusses Lastarria's evaluation of the colonial legacy in Latin America and whether the communities of that region were prepared to adopt a republican form of government. Section 5 describes and analyzes Lastarria's idea of "Semecracia" (self-government) as the most desirable form of government for postcolonial Latin American countries. Section 6 addresses the issue of political equality.

1. Liberalism on the Periphery

In the nineteenth century, the emergence of liberalism in Latin America became one of the powerful answers to the collapse of the Spanish empire. Key components of liberalism at that time were the emphasis on constitutionalism, individual freedoms, the sovereignty of the people, the separation of powers, and legal equality and protections.[13] However, these principles were not

[12]See Julian Go, "Thinking against Empire: Anticolonial Thought as Social Theory," *British Journal of Sociology* 74, no. 3 (2023): 279–93.

[13]Faviola Rivera, "Liberalism in Latin America," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta and Uri Nodelman (Winter 2022 edition).

uniform and were interpreted differently depending on the country's circumstances. The implementation of these ideals was often met with resistance from conservative groups and conflicts with the Catholic Church, leading to deviations from core liberal values. While Charles Hale[14] and Iván Jaksić and Eduardo Posada-Carbo[15] consider liberalism to be the most influential political ideology in nineteenth-century Latin America, Roberto Gargarella believes that this is an overstatement.[16] However, the crucial role that liberalism played in the region is indisputable. Nineteenth-century liberalism in Latin America adopted various ideological and political expressions with variable degrees of success.

In political terms, liberalism served as an ideological basis during the fight for independence from imperial rule and provided normative grounds for building nation-states in the region. By the end of the century, it had, according to Faviola Rivera, triumphed in Argentina and Chile, but was less successful in Colombia.[17] Liberalism also served as a basis for defending and designing institutions with fundamental variations. While liberals like Lastarria favored a decentralized government with high levels of municipal freedom, Argentinean and Mexican liberals ended up supporting a centralized federation with strong presidentialism.[18] Likewise, the constitutionalist fervor that characterized that century was marked by tensions between liberalism and conservatism.[19] While more conservative thinkers and sectors defended specific colonial legacies and, fundamentally, a prominent place for the Catholic Church in public affairs, liberal thinkers marked a certain distance from both the colonial legacy and the Catholic Church.[20]

In ideological or normative terms, Latin American liberalism is a form of Western liberalism with European roots, as Hale has argued.[21] It is, then, not surprising that criollos, the Latin American-born descendants of European settlers with significant European ties, played a leading role in advancing liberal ideologies.[22] Nonetheless, like other manifestations of non-European

[14]Charles Hale, "Political and Social Ideas in Latin America, 1870–1930," in *The Cambridge History of Latin America*, vol. 4, *c. 1870 to 1930*, ed. L. Bethell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 367–441.

[15]Jaksić and Posada-Carbó, *Liberalismo y poder.*

[16]Roberto Gargarella, *Latin American Constitutionalism,1810–2010: The Engine Room of the Constitution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[17]Rivera, "Liberalism in Latin America."

[18]Gabriel Negretto and José Antonio Aguilar Rivera. "Rethinking the Legacy of the Liberal State in Latin America: The Cases of Argentina (1853–1916) and Mexico (1857–1910)," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 32, no. 2 (2000): 361–97, 396.

[19]Hale, "Political and Social Ideas," 373.

[20]Hale, "Political and Social Ideas," 377–78.

[21]Hale, "Political and Social Ideas," 367.

[22]However, the propagation of liberal ideas in Latin America was not confined to criollos. This is, e.g., the case of Melchor Ocampo in México. I thank Carsten Andreas Schulz for this point.

liberalism, Latin American liberalism can be understood as peripheral insofar as liberals of the region did not participate to equal degrees in the transatlantic debate of ideas. Latin American liberal thinkers discussed among themselves and were constantly informed by the discussions originating in Europe and the United States. Nonetheless, their works were rarely read or discussed outside the continent.

The liberalism that developed on the periphery was highly influenced by central liberal traditions; however, this does not mean that peripheral liberalism is fundamentally "imitative" or "derivative" of theories originally developed in an intellectual center. As Gabriel Negretto and José Antonio Aguilar Rivera have argued, liberal thinkers in Latin America not only contextualized liberalism in new politically independent nations but also theorized and advanced autochthonous liberal institutions such as new forms of presidentialism and variations in the design and exercise of the division of powers, a federal government, and other political institutions.[23] As Javier Fernandez Sebastian points out, "when liberalism began to germinate in the region, it was by no means a transplanted plant from elsewhere, nor was it completely autochthonous; rather, it was an unknown transgenic species that emerged from the political and constitutional experiments of that immense Atlantic laboratory."[24]

2. Lastarria in Context

Unlike most creole intellectuals of his time, Lastarria came from humble origins.[25] He was born in Rancagua, a small city located eighty-seven kilometers south of Santiago. As a teenager, he received a scholarship to study in the capital. Lastarria never amassed any kind of wealth and struggled financially during most of his life. As a self-made man, he had unconditional faith in education as a crucial vehicle for social mobility.

Once relocated to Santiago, Lastarria was educated in the Liceo of Chile, headed by the Spaniard José Joaquín de Mora, and later the Colegio de Santiago under the direction of the Venezuelan polymath Andres Bello. Mora and Bello were two of the most notable intellectuals in nineteenth-century Latin America, and were brought to Chile to provide intellectual direction to

[23]Negretto and Aguilar Rivera. "Rethinking the Legacy," 367.

[24]Sebastián Fernández, Javier, *La aurora de la libertad: Los primeros liberalismos en el mundo iberoamericano* (Madrid: Marcial Pons Historia, 2012), 30.

[25]The most comprehensive biography is Alejandro Fuenzalida Grandón's *Lastarria i su tiempo (1817–1883): Su vida, obras e influencia en el desarrollo político e intelectual de Chile* (Santiago: Impr. Barcelona, 1911). For a briefer summaries see Sady Zañartu, *Lastarria: El hombre solo* (Santiago: Ediciones Ercilla, 1938); and Norman Sacks, "José Victorino Lastarria, un intelectual comprometido en la América Latina," *Revista Chilena de Historia y Geografía* 140 (1972): 153–93.

the newly independent nation. Their rivalry is well-documented, as Mora and Bello were central to the educative projects of competing political parties, Pipiolos (liberal) and Conservative, respectively.[26] Nonetheless, Lastarria learned from both masters, who exposed him to the philosophy of Hobbes, Locke, Blair, Bentham, Vattel, Constant, and Rousseau. Lastarria also benefitted from friendship and professional collaboration with prominent intellectual and political figures who were temporarily residing in Chile for different reasons, including the Argentineans Faustino Sarmiento and Juan Bautista Alberdi, as well as the Puerto Rican Eugenio Hostos and the French economist Courcelle-Seneuil.

Chile was peripheral even within the periphery of the Spanish Empire. These circumstances shaped him and other thinkers. As Luis Oyarzún pointed out, Chilean thinkers had received works from different schools of thought in an avalanche by the end of the first half of the nineteenth century.[27] Chilean intellectuals had the challenge of dealing with various traditions of thought without much preparation. This explains, Oyarzun claims, the strange mix of ideas and traditions that Lastarria offers in his work.[28] Lastarria made several attempts to fight against the impoverished intellectual climate of postcolonial Chile. He is credited as the founder of journals such as *El Crepúsculo* (1843–44), *Revista de Santiago* (1848–50), and *El Diario Oficial* (1876).[29] He participated in various intellectual societies, chairing the Sociedad Literaria (1842) and being a member of the Society of Equality, an organization devised to promote egalitarian ideals and challenge Chilean conservatism.

Lastarria's liberalism grew in the context of the most politically stable regime in Latin America during the century. After a period of political instability in the first post-independence years, the Constitution of 1833 established a strong presidential rule, with presidents having important control over the parliament and the electoral process.[30] The Constitution provided the parliament with some features such as a set of periodic laws (which the parliament needed to approve regularly) affecting the government budget. These helped erode presidential power over time and provided parliaments with more opportunities to pursue a liberal agenda.

[26]Bernardo Subercaseaux, *Historia de las ideas y de la cultura en Chile*, vol. 1, *Sociedad y cultura liberal en el siglo XIX: J. V. Lastarria* (Santiago de Chile, Editorial Universitaria, 2011), 43.

[27]Luis Oyarzún, *El pensamiento de Lastarria* (Santiago: Editorial Jurídica de Chile, 1953), 52–53.

[28]Oyarzún, *El pensamiento*, 52–53.

[29]Lastarria is also credited as the author of the first Chilean short story, *El Mendigo* (1843), and one of the first Chilean novels, *Don Guillermo* (1860).

[30]Sofia Correa Sutil, "Apogeo y crisis del liberalismo en Chile," in *Los desafios de la libertad: Transformacion y crisis del liberalismo en Europa y America Latina*, ed. Marcela Garcia Sebastiani and Fernando del Rey (Madrid, Editorial Biblioteca Nueva, S.L, 2013), 195.

According to Iván Jaksić and Sol Serrano,[31] three elements characterized nineteenth-century liberalism in Chile. First, those in government and those groups disputing political power agreed on a republican form of government as the right type of political regime for the country, as "the rule of representatives elected by the people."[32] Second, there was a continued search for proper equilibrium among executive and legislative powers in the country, in which parliamentary powers increased over time. Finally, all liberal transformations in the country were achieved through political reform rather than revolution. This absence of radicalism and emphasis on reformism set Chilean liberalism apart from other Latin American liberal projects.[33] Against this background, Lastarria developed a liberal project mainly grounded in the expansion of individual and political rights against the supremacy of government and its authoritarian advances.

3. Freedom in the New Republics

The most important question for Lastarria was how to promote freedom and human development in a postcolonial context. He defines freedom as the exercise of rights. There "is no right of men whose use is not freedom: that is why freedom is the right itself or the realization of the right. That is why freedom and law are the beginning, middle, and end of our life and development. That is why freedom has no other limits than those prescribed by the law …"[34] The law has no other purpose than to recognize the existence of rights: "if it sets exceptions, it denatures rights, opposing to its purpose, perverting its principles, and missing the truth. And with that mistaken procedure, it puts the seeds of institutional vice, discredits in authority, and discord in society."[35] We have a right to worship and practice religious beliefs, as well as to express opinions and to believe in whatever we want. We also have a set of civil rights. Those rights can be put into practice in the form of various freedoms such as the freedom to vote, compete for bureaucratic and professional positions, or pursue a particular business.[36]

[31]Jaksić and Serrano, "El gobierno y las libertades," 178.

[32]Negretto and Aguilar Rivera, "Rethinking the Legacy," 395.

[33]Alejandro San Francisco and Cristina Moyano. "El liberalismo en Chile en el siglo XIX: La formación del concepto, su trayectoria y sus dimensiones," in *La aurora de la libertad: Los primeros liberalismos en el mundo iberoamericano*, ed. Fernandez Sebastian (Madrid: Marcial Pons Historia, 2012), 152–53.

[34]Jose Victorino Lastarria, "Prologo a *Proyectos de lei y discursos parlamentarios*," in *Obras completas de don J. V. Lastarria* (Edición Oficial, vol. 3. Santiago de Chile: Imprenta Barcelona [1857], 1907), 6–7.

[35]Lastarria, "Prologo a *Proyectos de lei,*" 6–7.

[36]Lastarria, "Prologo a *Proyectos de lei*," 6–7.

In *On Liberty*, Mill famously proposed a "very simple principle" that should "govern absolutely the dealings of society with the individual in the way of compulsion and control."[37] Now known as the harm principle, it is the idea that "the sole end for which mankind are warranted, individually or collectively, in interfering with the liberty of action of any of their number is self-protection. That the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others."[38] In addition to the harm principle, *On Liberty* explores the importance of individuality and diversity by arguing that diversity and dissent are vital to a productive society as they lead to progress. Mill insists that voicing different opinions contributes to social and individual improvement, even if these opinions are false, as they challenge people to reevaluate their beliefs in the quest for truth. These ideas motivate him to examine both the boundaries of governmental authority and the risks associated with societal interference. His support for minimal government intervention stems from his belief that individuals are the best judges of their interests.

Lastarria engages with both Mill's *On Liberty* and Édouard Laboulaye's brief analysis of it. In just a few paragraphs, Laboulaye explains that his only objection to *On Liberty* is that it presents an incomplete analysis as it focuses on individual freedom while neglecting the role that the state has in political and economic affairs.[39] According to Laboulaye, this limitation reveals Mill's alignment with early eighteenth-century French economists, who saw the state as an enemy. Laboulaye contends that a comprehensive understanding of liberty should always address the complex interplay between the state and the economy and how that interplay affects individual freedom. Lastarria disagrees with Laboulaye on this and argues that Mill does offer an adequate analysis of the state and its implications by evaluating the state's potential for overreach and centralization, thereby highlighting the critical role of individual autonomy in human development.[40]

However, Lastarria is far from agreeing with Mill's theory of freedom. He disagrees with Mill's negative conception of freedom grounded on the harm principle, believing that Mill fails to understand the human laws behind the idea of freedom. Mill is like those scientists who can identify the phenomena of electricity and magnetism without understanding the proper natural rules that govern them.[41] Lastarria sees two problems with Mill's idea of liberty. First, freedom cannot be limited to the notion of harm, as that approach leads

[37]John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, in *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, vol. 18 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, Routledge & Kegan Paul, [1858] 1977), 223.
[38]Mill, *On Liberty*, 223.
[39]Édouard Laboulaye, *L'état et ses limites* (Paris: Charpentie, 1863), 67–68.
[40]Lastarria, *La América*, 50.
[41]Lastarria, *La América*, 50.

to a paradox. While the state can only act to avoid the occurrence of harm, it is within its prerogative to determine when harm does or may happen. If the state is entrusted to prevent the occurrence of harm, there is a risk that it may arbitrarily define the limits of what constitutes harm to others. The problem, of course, is that there will always be interests behind classifying certain activities as harmful and others as unharmful.[42] There is a real danger, Lastarria suggests, that the state can interfere with the exercise of rights in the name of harm reduction. This can eventually affect freedoms of press, association, and opinion by setting limits on freedoms based on a diagnosis of eventual harm that these activities might produce. This conception of freedom, then, does not identify and establish adequate limits on state action. This is a puzzling outcome, according to Lastarria, given that Mill's theory precisely intends to provide the theoretical foundations for a society that protect individuals from all manifestations of tyranny.[43]

Second, Lastarria did not trust the principle of utility as an adequate guide for state affairs. Mill argues that "utility in the largest sense" is "grounded on the permanent interests of man as a progressive being" and can be the "ultimate appeal on all ethical questions."[44] Our interests can "authorize the subjection of individual spontaneity to external control, only in respect to those actions of each, which concern the interest of the other people."[45] Utility becomes the primary criterion to identify cases in which harm produced by people's actions can authorize state intervention.[46] The difficulties are inherent in any utilitarian theory: we need to know not only how to define and measure utility, but also how to act in terms of those measurements.

To defend his proposal, Lastarria points out, Mill needs to appeal to several exceptions and caveats that destroy his theory and make it inapplicable.[47] Under the utilitarian paradigm, even the most sacred and important individual rights can be subjected to the state's absolute power, as it has the power in the name of society to determine when those rights can harm general utility, the common good, and permanent interests.[48] Mill's emphasis on the principle of utility as the foundation of his theory shows that he does not understand that freedom is "no other thing than the use of the rule of law."[49] Those living in South and North America know that the state's goal is to protect individual rights as limited by justice.[50] Mill cannot see the proper place of rights and freedom, as he is looking for political solutions within a

[42]Lastarria, *La América*, 51.
[43]Lastarria, *La América*, 51–52.
[44]Mill, *On Liberty*, 224.
[45]Mill, *On Liberty*, 224.
[46]Lastarria, *La América*, 52.
[47]Lastarria, *La América*, 53–54.
[48]Lastarria, *La América*, 53.
[49]Lastarria, *La América*, 53–54.
[50]Lastarria, *La América*, 54.

monarchic system that does not make that possible. Lastarria finds in Mill an example of Eurocentric thought. Like most European intellectuals, Mill is accused of being ignorant of the nature of republican government. He does not conceive of a non-monarchic form of government that requires democratic participation. Mill's conception of the state is based on the European experience, in which governments mostly oppose the promotion of individual freedom. Europeans, Lastarria says, do not know enough to comprehend the situation in Latin America and understand that the promotion of freedom can only be achieved through a republican state without a ruling monarchy.[51]

Lastarria's critique is focused on the type of state intervention required by Mill's theory of freedom. He reads Mill with particular attention to the role that the state should play in a liberal society without paying much attention to the danger that Mill sees in society, public opinion, and customs as a source of interference with individual freedoms. Mill talks about the need to provide protection not only against sources of state interference but fundamentally

> against the tyranny of prevailing opinion and feeling; against society's tendency to impose, by means other than civil penalties, its own ideas and practices as rules of conduct on those who dissent from them, to fetter the development, and if possible, prevent the formation, of any individuality not in harmony with its ways, and compel all characters to fashion themselves upon the model of its own.[52]

Lastarria does not perceive social norms as threats to individual freedom, arguing that these norms often emanate from prevailing beliefs and can evolve through intellectual progress, especially in societies where reason overcomes instinct.[53] Although he does not make it explicit in his critique of Mill, the two theorists conceive of public opinion very differently. While Mill warns about the "tyranny of the majority" and suggests that the prevalence of opinions can be highly detrimental to individual freedom, Lastarria sees public opinion as a source of legitimacy and a mechanism to shape behavior by providing a structure of moral support that helps people make informed decisions. Such recognition of social norms does not imply that Lastarria discounts the importance of freedom of expression and thought. He maintains that these freedoms are essential for human progress and that coercion of opposing opinions undermines individual freedoms and perpetuates fallacies in public discourse.[54] However, he believes that well-calibrated public opinion becomes an effective counterweight to state power, as open

[51]Lastarria, *La América*, 32. As Negretto and Aguilar Rivera suggest, Latin American liberals used the term republic as "rule by an elected aristocracy." See "Rethinking the Legacy," 369. Lastarria, as I explain in the following section, found the idea of a governing aristocracy problematic.

[52]Mill, *On Liberty*, 220.

[53]Lastarria, *Lecciones*, 38–39.

[54]Lastarria, *Lecciones*, 137.

dialogue and experience provide the most effective ways to rectify mistakes and control political power.[55]

Lastarria underestimated the dangers of the tyranny of the majority identified by Mill. Nonetheless, his view reflects the context in which he lived. In nineteenth-century Latin America, public opinion played a crucial role in governmental institutions' legitimacy, oversight, and popular control. As Hilda Sabato suggests,[56] in the post-revolutionary period, public opinion and suffrage were essential in the construction and legitimization of authority. This conception of public opinion was used as an alternative to the obsolete principle of the divine right of kings, giving way to popular sovereignty. Public opinion in the Spanish American postcolonial world, plagued by instability and numerous crises, did not act as a simple harmonizing force but actively influenced the transformation of government political structures. Contrary to the idea that public opinion fosters consensus and unification of voices, its role in this historical context allowed for more popular and inclusive forms of public discourse.[57] Given this contextualization, we can speculate on why Lastarria focuses on the dangers of the state and not on the tyrannical potential of majority opinion. Far from being seen as a source of oppression, public opinion was an indispensable mechanism not only for legitimizing and controlling political power but also for providing moral guidance in a free society.

4. Readiness for Postcolonial Governance

Nineteenth-century thinkers across Latin America faced the challenge of evaluating the legacies of colonial rule, and Lastarria is no exception with his strongly negative view of Spanish colonialism. His main ideas on this topic appeared in his *Investigaciones*[58] published in 1844 and *La América.* He believes that Spanish colonial institutions were against the progress of Latin American communities and no progressive change was possible without overcoming that legacy and eliminating its remnants. Spanish rule, supported by the Catholic Church, was characterized by high levels of structural corruption and administrative inefficiency. But more interestingly, Lastarria makes a bold case in favor of indigenous and mixed-race populations.

[55]Lastarria, *Lecciones*, 154–55.

[56]Hilda Sabato, *Republics of the New World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 132–33.

[57]Jeremy Adelman, *Sovereignty and Revolution in the Iberian Atlantic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 181–85.

[58]José Victorino. *Investigaciones sobre la influencia social de la conquista i del sistema colonial de los españoles en Chile*, in *Obras completas de Don J. V.* Lastarria (Edición Oficial, vol. 7. Santiago de Chile: Imprenta Barcelona, [1844] 1909).

Lastarria identifies an example of struggle, courage, and freedom in the original inhabitants of the Chilean territory, regarding them as a model from which post-independent Chile should be built. Thus the nation's future should be modeled through the example set by the indigenous, not by the actions of the Spanish colonizers and their oppressive institutions. Moreover, in "the secondary race commonly called mestizos, the mixed descendants of Spaniards and Native Americans," Lastarria recognizes the substance of the nation.[59] In his view, the "nobility of blood" is nonsense that merits no reasonable justification. In Spanish America, "with the mestizos, we conquer our independence, and with them we make our industry progress. Here is an irrefragable testimony of their capacity."[60] Later, Lastarria participated as a legislator in the parliamentary discussions about the colonization of the Araucania in 1868—in the colonization of Mapuches and other indigenous populations living in the south of Chile. He opposed any form of violent colonization. His arguments, however, were grounded on reasons of efficiency and feasibility rather than rights or injustice. Lastarria believed that violent interventions would unnecessarily take many lives and resources on both sides.[61]

Lastarria consistently questions colonial institutions. There is nothing in the legacy from Spanish rule that can help Latin American communities to achieve self-rule and freedom. Only a republic forged in liberal institutions can achieve that. While another Latin American liberal, Juan Bautista Alberdi believed that people in Latin America might not be prepared for liberal political institutions,[62] Lastarria argued that this underestimated the transformative power of political institutions. From his perspective, it is a mistake to believe that institutional change is only possible when social customs and

[59]Lastarria, *La América*, 87.

[60]Lastarria, *La América*, 103. Other influential Latin American liberals challenged this view. Domingo Faustino Sarmiento argued that the savages praised by Lastarria should not even be part of post-revolutionary American history. Instead, they are part of a "foreign country," a "nation foreign to Chile," which Chile must "absorb, destroy or enslave," just as the Spaniards did before. Bello believed that the destruction of the original peoples was inevitable in America: "The indigenous races disappear and will be lost in the long run in the colonies of the transatlantic peoples, leaving no more vestiges than a few naturalized words in the upstart languages, and scattered monuments." For him and Andrés Bello, the new American nations were to be forged on a European basis according to colonial heritage. Their main point was that not all colonial institutions were harmful; some were even favorable for Latin American progress. See Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, *Obras de D. F. Sarmiento*, vol. 2 (Buenos Aires: Librarie Generale, 1885), 214; and Andrés Bello, *Obras completas de don Andrés Bello*, vol. 7 (Santiago de Chile: Impreso P. G. Ramírez, 1884).

[61]Lastarria, *Proyectos de lei i discursos parlamentarios*, 391–426.

[62]Juan Bautista Alberdi, "Bases y puntos de partida para la organizacion de la Republica Argentina," in *Obras Completas de Juan Bautista Alberdi*, vol. 3 (Buenos Aires: Imp. de "La Tribuna Nacional," [1852] 1886).

opinions are shaped accordingly. That position usually involves the idea that education in schools, books, and civic education is the only instrument to achieve this—that is, teaching citizens to exercise their freedom.

Lastarria argues that, if the American colonies had waited for the results of this process to have democratic institutions, it is doubtful these republics would be in place because it would neglect the most potent source of teaching and learning: the law. In order to have political reforms and reshape customs and opinions, laws are more important than education.[63] Education needs to support the motivational and behavioral goals behind the law, which is the most crucial educative instrument. "The power of institutions over social customs" is "admirable."[64] Accordingly, we should not waste time in preparations, as even societies that emerged from colonialism can adapt to the rule of law and justice, and if they do not know how to exercise and practice it, they will learn in the course of exercising it.[65] Even immature societies can adopt democratic institutions. In most Latin American communities, people know how to exercise their rights. Lastarria recognized that in some cases of "backward people" it is possible that the state and political power are misused and that the people do not control that kind of inappropriate behavior. However, even in those cases, good laws are preferable to bad ones. Political reform needs to be carried out in radical terms, even if its purpose is only to educate people in the practice of freedom and exercise of rights.

This position put Lastarria in opposition to Mill's approach. In *Considerations*, Mill argues that "The first question in respect to any political institutions is, how far they tend to foster in the members of the community the various desirable qualities—moral, intellectual and active."[66] The best government performs this task better, as "it is on these qualities, so far as they exist in the people, that all possibility of goodness in the practical operations of the government depends."[67] Therefore, it is essential to know what form of government works better for any particular society, and that decision will be based on determining which kind of government "tends most to give them that for want of which they cannot advance or advance only in a lame and lopsided manner."[68]

Mill believed that "Political institutions are the work of men. In every stage of their existence they are made what they are only by human voluntary agency."[69] However, political machinery is not self-operating. It needs from

[63]Lastarria, *Lecciones*, 210.
[64]Lastarria, *Lecciones*, 210.
[65]Lastarria, *Lecciones*, 216.
[66]John Stuart Mill. *Considerations on Representative Government*. In *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, vol 19 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, Routledge & Kegan Paul, [1861] 1977), 376.
[67]Mill, *Considerations*, 396.
[68]Mill, *Considerations*, 396.
[69]Mill, *Considerations*, 376.

people "not their simple acquiescence, but their active participation and must be adjusted to the capacities and qualities of such men as are available."[70] Mill proposes three conditions that must be met for any suitable form of government: "The people for whom the form of government is intended must be willing to accept: or at least not so unwilling as to oppose an insurmountable obstacle to its establishment. They must be willing and able to do what is necessary to keep it standing. And they must be willing and able to do what it requires of them to enable it and fulfill its purposes."[71] These three conditions limit the choice of specific forms of government. In consequence, not all forms of government are suited to all communities. It is imperative to evaluate "the existing stage of that country" and examine to what extent it can fulfill the conditions. For example, representative government can be unsuitable in the case of people who have "still to learn the first lesson of civilization, that of obedience."[72] Barbarian societies that do not voluntarily submit to state power can eventually benefit from being conquered and taught to obey.

Lastarria finds such arguments unpersuasive and dangerous. To begin with, Mill misunderstood the idea of obedience. What matters is not that people can comply with a specific law or command, but that societies have in place a proper rule of law that allows people to pursue their interests. In Mill's view, non-civilized societies may need despotic rule to promote obedience in the population. Lastarria suggests that this is a puzzling position for Mill to take, as Mill also argues that "among the foremost benefits of free government is that education of the intelligence and of the sentiments, which is carried down to the very lowest ranks of the people when they are called to take a part in acts which directly affect the great interests of their country."[73] Lastarria says that this position is confusing as Mill "insists at the same time in convincing us that representative government needs in the people who adopt it special conditions that will never be possible to find collectively, and in which figures the capacity for obedience, as if there were more or less rebellious people, the genuine result of the triumph of the law in the free peoples, just as it is from terror in the slave peoples."[74] Lastarria argues that Mill acknowledges the role of free governance in educating the populace on the nation's critical issues while he simultaneously argues that representative government requires specific conditions that in certain societies can be unattainable among their constituents, including a capacity for obedience. This presents an inconsistency: while advocating for the liberating aspects of free governance, Mill paradoxically suggests that such a system is viable only when citizens exhibit qualities that seem antithetical to the notion of freedom.

[70]Mill, *Considerations*, 376.
[71]Mill, *Considerations*, 376.
[72]Mill, *Considerations*, 415.
[73]Lastarria, *La América*, 59 quoting Mill, *Considerations*, 467–68.
[74]Lastarria, *Lecciones*, 58–59.

In this dichotomy, obedience emerges not as a voluntary alignment with societal values, as expected in free societies, but as a compulsory conduct analogous to that observed under oppressive regimes.

5. Semecracia

Lastarria believes that Mill's idea of representative government is simplistic and, therefore, inappropriate for the Latin American context.[75] On the one hand, Mill's proposal focuses too much on the potential that alternative forms of government may have to enhance or improve the qualities of the government and of society as a whole. This criterion can apply to any form of government and justify any form of intervention. It does not tell us anything specific about representative government. These vague reasons "could serve the sultan of Turkey, the czar of Russia and the emperor of France to believe that their governments are the good ones because they provide their peoples what they need to progress."[76] Similar reasons could "lead the Americans to maintain that their republics are a better form of government because they tend to increase the good qualities of their governed."[77]

On the other hand, Lastarria suggests that Mill builds his theory of representative government on abstract concepts such as order and progress. Those concepts can be used to justify any form of government, even highly despotic regimes. Instead, we need to develop a form of government centered on law and that serves as a basis for promoting the diversity of interests proper to individuals living in a free society. The form of government that enables these goals is one centered on the idea of self-government.[78]

According to Lastarria, the foundational misconception underlying many governmental organizations in Europe and America rests on amalgamating three archetypal forms of governance: democracy, aristocracy, and monarchy.[79] The critical problem with mixed forms of government is that those alternatives have promoted "unnatural outcomes" and have established artificial aristocracies.[80] Mixed governments produce senates resembling aristocracies and presidential dictatorships that simulate monarchic rules, which have curtailed individual and social rights to minimize the influence of democratic aspects. He suggests that, despite representing contrasting forms of government, the concepts of "republic" and "constitutional monarchy" are often employed interchangeably. In mixed governments that use these terms, sovereignty retains its absolute nature by manipulating the representative

[75]Lastarria, *La América*, 55.
[76]Lastarria, *La América*, 55–56.
[77]Lastarria, *La América*, 56.
[78]Lastarria, *La América*, 55–56.
[79]Lastarria, *Lecciones*, 244.
[80]Lastarria, *Lecciones*, 244.

system, causing inconsistent political structures.[81] Lastarria discredits the notion that "elementary forms of government" or democratic principles could serve as reliable criteria for classification. We should not label governments as "democratic" merely based on the existence of some form of popular suffrage, despite their actual despotic or oligarchic characteristics.[82]

Lastarria argues that a better analytical strategy separates government forms into two primary and distinct categories: those characterized by absolute sovereignty and those guided by self-governance.[83] The former are defined by the existence of antisocial privileges, a commonality across all forms of authoritarian rule—be it dynastic, aristocratic, or a popular oligarchy. Within this category, governments vary in their structures, exhibiting unlimited political power. For instance, constitutional monarchies amalgamate monarchical, aristocratic, and democratic elements. Oligarchic republics are typified by administrative centralization under a provisional leader with dictatorial authority and unaccountable power, even over representative assemblies. In contrast, democratic and social republics with absolute power may adopt various frameworks, such as popular or national assemblies overseen by authoritative commissions or directorates.[84]

Semecracia is the regime that better promotes self-government, the government of the people by the people.[85] In 1868, Lastarria proposed semecratic reform as a peaceful change for the Chilean political system, which he saw as having an excessive concentration of power and an exclusionary form of government.[86] In his original formulation, Lastarria believed that promoting self-government provides a path toward political stability and freedom for Chilean citizens without further education or other preparations for exercising political rights. Like other Latin American thinkers of the nineteenth century,[87] Lastarria sought inspiration in the US federal model as a form of government that decentralizes authority, thus mitigating the risks associated with the concentration of power.

In *Lecciones*, Lastarria identifies five core characteristics of semecratic regimes.[88] First, political power remains constrained by the recognition and practical application of social rights and individual freedoms beyond the reach of political maneuvering. Second, through the direct and free

[81]Lastarria, *Lecciones*, 252–53.
[82]Lastarria, *Lecciones*, 253.
[83]Lastarria, *Lecciones*, 254–55.
[84]Lastarria, *Lecciones*, 254-5.
[85]José Victorino Lastarria, *La reforma política: Unica salvacion de la republica. Unico medio de plantear la semecracia o gobierno de si mismo* (Santiago: Imprenta la Libertad, 1868), 455.
[86]Lastarria, *La reforma politica*, 455–58.
[87]José María Luis Mora (1794–1850), Vicente Rocafuerte (1783–1847), Domingo Sarmiento (1811–88), and Juan Bautista Alberdi (1810–84).
[88]Lastarria, *Lecciones*, 254–55.

election of public functionaries, the government emerges from the people, considered a lawful and popular mandate. Third, these functions possess a temporal alternation and actual accountability without prerequisite conditions. Fourth, legal equality is guaranteed for all citizens and public officials, and any form of preferential treatment or privilege is abolished. Fifth, the political organization of public administration is decentralized, which enables local and communal units to govern their specific interests autonomously. These attributes are inherently interconnected and shape the essence of a semecratic government, which is rooted in limited sovereignty and accountable governance. Thus, semecratic governance emphasizes that political power serves as a temporal and responsible mandate at national and local levels of government. These functions do not infringe upon social rights or individual freedoms; instead, they aim to nurture the development of civil society and its constituents.[89]

Semecracia facilitates a harmony of the principle of independence and individual freedom extending from the family and work sphere to the government. It reflects an understanding of popular sovereignty in which the supreme power of government rests in the people. Semecracia in Chile should be aimed at significant changes in the functioning of the judicial, executive, and legislative branches, as well as changes in the electoral system. The reform Lastarria seeks includes a variety of changes, from strengthening individual rights that guarantee freedoms against the state (e.g., freedom of thought and expression, of religion and association) through constitutional rights that guarantee legal equality and eliminate privileges and particular jurisdictions to strengthening municipal government. A political reform based on these principles can abolish oppressive laws and ensure the representation of diverse social interests.[90] The goal of this reformist approach is to achieve political freedom and social progress while protecting civil liberties and rights. This shift in governance would reduce the detrimental effects of arbitrary rule and prevent the devastation that often results from failed uprisings. Thus the proposed principles offer a solid framework for reconfiguring municipal and provincial governance.

Lastarria believes that, under this system, individuals are free to pursue their interests. Semecracia rests on a decentralized power scheme in which townships play a crucial role. Townships should have authority over various issues and allow their inhabitants to participate (either by deliberating or ruling) in political and administrative decisions. In a political regime oriented to townships, "people deliberate and solve issues by themselves."[91] European governments keep the tradition of absolute power and are built on the opposite premise: a centralized and concentrated power.[92] The closest

[89]Lastarria, *Lecciones*, 254–55.
[90]Lastarria, *La reforma politica*, 464–65.
[91]Lastarria, *Lecciones*, 475–76.
[92]Lastarria, *Lecciones*, 47.

example to the semecratic model was found in America. Lastarria saw in the United States the role model for Latin American countries. His selective view of the US political regime helped him to formulate localized answers for Chile and Hispanic America.[93] Lastarria's defense of the township as an institutional mechanism to promote self-government relies on De Tocqueville's[94] analysis and description of US townships. In Lastarria's view, thanks to the absence of a ruling monarchy, the US strongly relied on self-government at different levels (federal, state, counties, townships). This is the best recipe against despotism, which requires a state that functions as a vehicle to guarantee the rule of law and freedom.

Although Lastarria believes that Mill's idea of representative government is simplistic, in his efforts to determine the best form of government, Lastarria makes a simplistic reading of Mill's defense of representative democratic government. He attributes to Mill a vision almost exclusively centered on promoting and developing civic skills for citizens, without considering the rest of the elements that the English philosopher includes in his defense of representative government. For example, we cannot fully understand Mill's proposal without considering the importance he attributes to the protection of individual liberties, the political participation of citizens, the prevention of the tyranny of majorities, and the importance of confronting the dangers of social conformity. From Mill's perspective, the form of government that promotes the best results for individuals and society as a whole needs to address these points and not only, as Lastarria seems to suggest, focus on vague ideas of order and progress and on the eagerness to develop civil skills in its citizens.

6. Political Equality

In Europe and Latin America, the second half of the nineteenth century witnessed an extensive debate about who should vote, when, and how—and, more importantly, who should be elected.[95] Yet it was in postcolonial Latin America where "the vast majority of the nineteenth-century world's

[93]In her analysis of other Latin American thinkers (Sarmiento, Marti, Vasconcelos), Julie Hooker found a similar pattern of selectivity in the reading of the US reality. *Theorizing Race in the Americas: Douglass, Sarmiento, Du Bois, and Vasconcelos* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

[94]Alexis Tocqueville, *Democracy in America: And Two Essays on América* (London: Penguin, [1835, 1840] 2003), chapter 5, vol. 1.

[95]Alan Kahan, *Liberalism in Nineteenth-Century Europe: The Political Culture of Limited Suffrage* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), and Jose Antonio Aguilar, Eduardo Posada-Carbó, and Eduardo Zimmermann. "Democracy in Spanish America: The Early Adoption of Universal Male Suffrage, 1810–1853," *Past and Present* 256, no. 1 (2022): 165–202.

republics" were located.[96] Extended suffrage was promoted in most Latin American countries during the first half of the nineteenth century.[97] In Chile, during that century, with the exception of the 1891 presidential contest, electors had the chance to vote every five years since 1833 in presidential elections.[98] The universal franchise for literate males was adopted in 1874, by assuming that literate men possessed the required income or wealth to vote.[99] Lastarria used Mill's *Considerations* to think about, compare, and adjust the components of representative government taking place in Chile and the region.

Mill articulated a defense of plural voting and a singular view about who should legislate. A common principle underlies his proposals: good government requires that the voice of the most enlightened members of society be amplified. "The only thing which can justify reckoning one person's opinion as equivalent to more than one, is individual mental superiority; and what is wanted is some approximate means of ascertaining that."[100] Ideally, this could be measured through a "trustworthy system of general examination" or the existence of a system of "national education." In their absence, "the nature of a person's occupation is some test."[101] In practice, that means that the vote of people practicing certain occupations (e.g., liberal professions) should count more. Lastarria rejects the proposal of restricted suffrage and plural voting on two grounds: (a) as a violation of political sovereignty and (b) as an infringement of the principle of equality before the law.

6.1. Restricted Suffrage and Plural Voting as a Violation of Political Sovereignty

Roughly speaking, Lastarria defines sovereignty as the constitutive authority or power behind the state.[102] In his view, voting is a crucial mechanism for exercising sovereignty. The exercise of political sovereignty involves all citizens who are the subjects of the rights and obligations in the society whereby the state is constituted. Hence, all citizens have a right to vote as a mechanism to exercise political sovereignty. Citizens are responsible for making the state and its public officials accountable to collective interests. Any limitation to this principle of political sovereignty, either in favor of an

[96]James Sanders, *The Vanguard of the Atlantic World* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 4.

[97]Eduardo Posada-Carbó, ed., *Elections before Democracy: The History of Elections in Europe and Latin America* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1996), 6.

[98]Samuel Valenzuela, "Building Aspects of Democracy before Democracy: Electoral Practices in Nineteenth Century Chile," in *Elections before Democracy*. ed. Posada-Carbó, 223–57, 224.

[99]Posada-Carbó, *Elections before Democracy*.

[100]Mill, *Considerations*, 474–75.

[101]Mill, *Considerations*, 475.

[102]Lastarria, *Lecciones*, 300.

oligarchy or a governing class, is against the principles of self-government and creates artificial privileges.[103] Thus, voting is the mechanism to exercise sovereignty and perfect the collective interest. Limitations on voting based on property and capacity are immoral, as they lead to a governing oligarchy or a governing class. It is expected that these privileged groups will seek to reinforce their prerogatives and neglect people's collective interest. This failure to represent interests degrades the principle of political sovereignty and, consequently, the state itself.[104]

In the broader historical context, Lastarria's ideas might be considered progressive when compared to contemporaneous liberal thought in Europe and Latin America. After all, Alberdi supported voter prerequisites like intelligence and property, as he considered them necessary to preserve the integrity of elections.[105] Similarly, Samper[106] advocated for a voting process that was direct and confidential, limited to literate citizens. Both these frameworks aim to achieve informed and accountable voting, thus fortifying the institution of democracy and encouraging mass education.

Nevertheless, Lastarria advocated universality with two caveats. First, the criteria for voting should encompass only two conditions: attainment of civil rights at age 21 and completion of primary education.[107] He asserted that these requirements serve as an equitable and logical framework because they neither exclude the majority of the populace nor compromise the quality of electoral decisions. Rather, they ensure that voters have adequate means to form educated opinions on matters of governance. Second, he excludes those engaged in a relationship of dependency (e.g., non-independent women, children, military personnel, etc.). People involved in a relationship of dependency may not be able to express their true preferences through voting. In consequence, women who can exercise their rights with independence and can cooperate in society should vote.[108]

Lastarria suggests that universal suffrage should contain an exception for women who, though older than 21 and having completed primary education, still rely on menial labor for their livelihood.[109] This group of women, given their dependent status, lacks the competence to understand or engage meaningfully in political activities. Men in similar socio-economic conditions are more likely to demonstrate a greater aptitude and independence in exercising their political rights, not by virtue of inherent intelligence but due to societal

[103]Lastarria, *Lecciones*, 300–02.
[104]Lastarria, *Lecciones*, 311.
[105]Alberdi, "Bases y puntos de partida," 475–76.
[106]Jose Maria Samper. *Ensayo sobre las revoluciones politicas y la condicion social de las republicas colombianas* (Paris: Imprenta de E Thunot y C, 1861), 234–35.
[107]Lastarria, *Lecciones*, 321.
[108]Lastarria, *Lecciones*, 319.
[109]Lastarria, *Lecciones*, 322.

structures that favor male activity.[110] Even though Lastarria acknowledges the transformative role that women can play in society upon emancipation from familial constraints, thereby becoming contributors to social cooperation, he argues that withholding women's suffrage is justifiable under current societal conditions.[111] The enfranchisement of women will materialize as an indispensable political right once societal progress sufficiently alters women's circumstances, equating their societal role to that of men.[112]

The inconsistency in Lastarria's argument concerning suffrage and primary education undermines his notion that freedom functions as an essential educational instrument. Requiring primary education for voting eligibility excludes individuals who could learn political responsibility through active electoral participation, his main point in support of semecratic government. This logical flaw extends to women's suffrage as well. If Lastarria champions republican institutions as educational mechanisms for self-governance, voting could serve as a similar educational experience, enhancing women's independence and societal contributions.

Lastarria failed to engage with other liberal views that were available to him and that challenge his arguments. His failure to engage with Mill's stance on women's suffrage represents a missed opportunity to strengthen or reevaluate his own position. Mill's *The Subjection of Women*, translated into Spanish by Martina Barros Borgoño (1850–1944) and published in a journal founded by Lastarria in 1848, could have offered compelling counterarguments to his proposals.[113] Similarly, while Lastarria quoted and praised Florentino González's (1805–74) treatise on constitutional law, he did not address González's arguments in favor of universal suffrage. González, who translated Mill's *Considerations* into Spanish, also discusses Mill's views on suffrage and representative government.

In González's view, genuine democracy can only be achieved when all competent adults participate in governance as restrictions disenfranchise large groups and impede societal evolution.[114] If voting is understood as a mechanism for individuals to express their political will and engage in civic matters, denying this right to women constitutes an indefensible position.[115] This restriction not only discriminates on the basis of gender but also undermines the principles of democracy and equality, which form the foundation of fair governance. This exclusion can corrode the democratic framework and

[110]Lastarria, *Lecciones*, 322.
[111]Lastarria, *Lecciones*, 322.
[112]Lastarria, *Lecciones*, 322.
[113]John Stuart Mill. "La Esclavitud de la Mujer," *Revista de Santiago* 2 (1872–73). Trans. Martina Barros Borgoño.
[114]Florentino González, *Lecciones de Derecho Constitucional* (Paris: Rosa y Bouret, 1871), 116–17.
[115]González, *Lecciones*, 124.

make society unequal and undemocratic.[116] According to González, limiting suffrage to educated individuals not only isolates significant sections of society but also absolves the educated of their responsibility to educate others.[117] He contends that a truly democratic society should extend voting rights to all capable adults, irrespective of their educational background. Lastarria, although familiar with González's work, failed to evaluate these points in his formulation of suffrage rules for semecratic governments.

6.2. Restricted Suffrage and Plural Voting as an Infringement of the Principle of Equality before the Law

Lastarria's second argument against plural voting is based on the formal criterion of equality before the law. Equality is a complementary right to individual freedom. According to Lastarria, false conceptions of equality create several problems. Men are born free and have the right to use their internal and external conditions to develop their lives and cooperate with others. Likewise, all men are equal because they have the same rights.[118] There are, however, inequalities that naturally arise from luck and from differences in men's natures. This does not contradict the fact that men enjoy equality of rights.[119] From these two universal laws of human nature, a crucial social phenomenon is related to the hierarchical relationships produced by these unequal outcomes. For Lastarria, it is vital to determine if social hierarchies are based not on human nature but rather historical accidents such as castes, slavery, or artificial aristocracies. For him modern societies have hierarchies that are not founded on castes or slavery but on the roles that people assume in various social activities. But these differences born from natural inequalities of human capacities do not suppose that there are moral and legal differences in these activities.[120] They instead are equal, legally speaking, just as all mutual relationships, whatever their hierarchy, are based on strict equality of rights. Likewise, they are morally equal because, even though there may be some material differences derived from their exercise, social considerations determine social hierarchy. All men should aspire to obtain this social consideration by the functions they fulfill.[121]

Schemes of restricted or even plural voting violate this principle—the former because it unjustifiably excludes citizens from participating in the scheme of cooperation, and the latter because giving more votes to any particular citizen due to their role in society or intellectual capacity goes

[116]González, *Lecciones*, 124.
[117]González, *Lecciones*, 119–21.
[118]Lastarria, *Lecciones*, 187.
[119]Lastarria, *Lecciones*, 188.
[120]Lastarria, *Lecciones*, 197.
[121]Lastarria, *Lecciones*, 198.

against the principle of equality, creating unjustified privileges.[122] Each vote needs to be equal in value.[123] Plural voting promotes privileges and social hierarchies. No matter our position or capacity in society, our mutual cooperation relationships are based on strict equality of rights. Lastarria rejected the idea of granting power to a particular class of citizens because of their intellectual attributes. He opposed a model based on a governing class of relatively few individuals, an aristocratic class better fitted than other citizens to govern. The government should not be understood as the government of the best or the worst; instead, it should be conceived as the government of all. Any principle that attributes hierarchical status will undermine this idea and lead to injustice and privilege. Problems in government should be corrected by promoting and expanding freedoms, not by creating special classes of citizens.[124] Artificial aristocracies are unsustainable in modern society because they eventually will lack support and stability. Once society realizes that the state's activities are not on behalf of a dominant class only, public opinion will force those privileges to eventually disappear.[125]

7. Conclusion

In *La América*, Lastarria quoted Samper to lament that Europeans have "put more interest in studying our volcanoes than our societies"; they know "our insects better than our literature."[126] More than 130 years after his death, this inattention is gradually changing with scholars from various regions studying nineteenth-century Latin American political thinkers.

Undoubtedly, Mill and Lastarria occupy different places in the canon of political thought. Both are quintessential nineteenth-century liberals, but only Mill's work has acquired a global scope, included on lists of standard political theory programs around the globe. Although Lastarria's name regularly appears in any treatise about Latin American political thought, his political theory is still broadly understudied and unknown. Lastarria's political thought is a valuable resource for anybody interested in understanding Latin American liberalism. He did not just combine different schools of thought in the attempt to better understand and explain a postcolonial context; he engaged in conversations with thinkers both within and outside of Latin America.

This article shows how Lastarria's liberalism substantively differed from Mill's. It presents Lastarria's main ideas on the nature of freedom, the state, and government. The Chilean thinker saw in Mill's approach to freedom and

[122]Lastarria, *Lecciones*, 318–19.
[123]Lastarria, *Lecciones*, 325.
[124]Lastarria, *Lecciones*, 199.
[125]Lastarria, *Lecciones*, 195.
[126]Lastarria, *La América*, 11.

representative government a defense of artificial hierarchies and an ideal of freedom compatible with despotic rule. While he contended that universal suffrage should be extended to all autonomous individuals without regard to their financial status or intellectual abilities, he suggested that, given the contemporary societal norms, women's right to vote should not be recognized yet. In *La América*, Lastarria attributes the errors and issues he finds in Mill's political theory to a lack of knowledge on Mill's part about the realities and experiences of the newly founded American republics.

> We would have to write a book as voluminous as the English author's to announce and refute his mistakes, errors that can be fatal to Americans if they do not realize that all the false perspectives of the English philosopher, all the absurdities that he presents as remedies for ills that democracy does not have, are effects of the fact that he does not know it and tries to judge it by the representative aristocracy of Great Britain, attributing all the vices of that phenomenon that among the English has produced the transaction of the monarchy, aristocracy, and the commoners.[127]

This article also contributes a first step to a better understanding the reception of Mill's ideas by Latin American political thinkers. The gap in both English-speaking and Spanish-speaking literature is surprising, given the influence that Mill's theory of representative government had on central nineteenth-century Latin American liberals. We find discussions of Mill in the writings of the Colombians Florentino González, and Justo Arosemena, the Uruguayan Justino Jiménez de Aréchaga, the Chilean Martina Barros, the Argentinean Luis Vicente Varela, or the Brazilian Jose de Alencar, among others. Yet little attention has been paid to how these thinkers evaluated Mill's proposals and how they read each other's work.

[127]Lastarria, *La América*, 58–59.