

THE POLITICAL THOUGHT OF JOSÉ OSVALDO DE MEIRA PENNA

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ABSTRACT: The purpose of this article is to investigate the intellectual influences of José Osvaldo de Meira Penna's arguments on the origins of the Brazilian paternalistic state. As a classical liberal, Meira Penna is easily connected to different schools of thought such as the Chicago, Virginia, and Austrian schools. In his book, *O dinossauro*, Meira Penna argues that Brazil's paternalism stems from past constructivist ideas that were imported into the country. Meira Penna's arguments display influence from different schools of thought; however, most of Meira Penna's arguments demonstrate a clear influence from the Austrian school. Meira Penna's critique of constructivism and call for the formation of a spontaneous order support the conclusion that Friedrich Hayek has had the greatest influence on Meira Penna's critique of the Brazilian paternalistic state. In the history of ideas, *O dinossauro* is best understood as a robust Austrian critique of the Brazilian Leviathan.

José Osvaldo de Meira Penna was a leading proponent of liberalism in Brazil. He was the founder the Tocqueville Society, the head of the Instituto Liberal in Brazil, and a member of the Mont Pelerin Society. He worked as a diplomat for nearly forty years serving as a Brazilian ambassador to nations including Norway, Ecuador, Poland, Nigeria, and Israel (Barroso and de Souza 2013). Toward the conclusion of his diplomatic career, he began devoting time to authoring papers on psychology (Meira Penna 1972, 1974), economics and morality (Meira Penna 2002), the

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All translations of Meira Penna's words are my own.



history of ideas, politics, and philosophy (Meira Penna 1973, 1982, 1991, 1994). Given Meira Penna's robust body of work, it is difficult to ascertain all the intellectual influences within his writings.

Marco A. Barroso and Alexandro Ferreira de Souza's (2013) research identifies the major intellectuals who most affected Meira Penna's thinking and acknowledges the great influence the Austrian school of economics had on Meira Penna's thought. However, it is difficult to precisely separate arguments influenced by the Austrian school from those that are simply logical conclusions drawn from the robust catalog of classical liberal thinkers. Given this difficulty, the purpose of this study is to expose the reader to concrete examples of Meira Penna's application of concepts that were clearly inherited from the Austrian school.

Meira Penna was part of a rare group of Brazilian thinkers who battled for economic freedom in an atmosphere unfriendly to this ideal. As Barroso and de Souza (2013, 44) observe, "Unlike many of his generation, who interpreted and defended a State in the form of Hobbesian paternalistic and providential Leviathan, Meira Penna chose to deconstruct this idea, demonstrating the damage that the Dinosaur State can cause to its citizens." In his book, *O dinossauro*, Meira Penna attempts to track the origins of the Brazilian Leviathan in the history of ideas using arguments drawn from the Austrian school. Certainly, Adam Smith, John Locke, Alexis de Tocqueville, and many other intellectuals influenced Meira Penna's political thought, but the Austrian school shines brightest in his writings.

This paper identifies features of Meira Penna's arguments that are clearly influenced by the Austrian school. The main feature regards the problems of constructivist rationalism in which Meira Penna expands on Friedrich Hayek's critique of rationalists such as René Descartes. Meira Penna argues that the rationalism of Descartes facilitated the creation of romantic philosophers such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Auguste Comte. These philosophers—especially Comte—affected the institutional foundations of Brazil. In his treatment of constructivism, Meira Penna echoes many of F. A. Hayek's arguments; manifesting the influence of the Austrian school on his political thought.

This paper summarizes Meira Penna's thoughts on different economists such as Milton Friedman, James Buchanan, Friedrich Hayek, Ludwig von Mises, and John Maynard Keynes. Then, this paper explores Meira Penna's critiques of Cartesian rationalism, Rousseau's romanticism, and Comte's positivism in Brazil. Finally,

it provides an analysis of Meira Penna's liberal solution for the Brazilian constructivist mentality.

JOSÉ OSVALDO DE MEIRA PENNA, A LIBERAL THINKER

In his article, "Mises e Hayek contra Keynes," which was originally published in the *Jornal da tarde* in 1991 and later republished in 1992 in his book *Decência já*, Meira Penna (1992) not only comments on the famous debate surrounding the government's role in growing the economy but also extends that debate to the Brazilian context. Meira Penna regrets the fact that the work of scholars like Hayek, Mises, Friedman, and Buchanan were not popular in Brazil. Meira Penna acknowledges the relevance and significance of the Virginia and Chicago schools, but his greatest appreciation was for Mises and Hayek. Meira Penna concludes that Mises and Hayek were two of the greatest thinkers of the twentieth century (Meira Penna 1992).

Meira Penna considered Mises's *Human Action* to be monumental, and he celebrated the book's translation into Portuguese (Meira Penna 1992). In addition, Meira Penna blamed Brazil's socio-economic underdevelopment on widespread Marxist thought in Brazilian universities and on Keynesian influence in the Brazilian government (Meira Penna 1992).

Meira Penna also applies Hayek's *The Road to Serfdom* to Brazil. Meira Penna argues that Hayek correctly identifies the danger of government intervention. In Brazil's case, Meira Penna asserts that the imagination of the people was captivated by central planning. President Juscelino Kubitschek's ambitious plan to build the new capital city, Brasília, is one example. Curiously, Meira Penna acknowledges that government intervention provided some benefits. He recognizes that such projects created an environment of institutional stability, but he also notes that government intervention created a precedent for more planning with clear socialist inclinations (Meira Penna 1992).

Meira Penna's political philosophy is founded on methodological individualism; however, methodological individualism is a characteristic shared by many schools of thought. In the following remark, one may see evidence of both Austrian and Virginia school principles: "The democratic state's true 'will' is a product of compromise, a nebulous common denominator of everyone's ephemeral and conflicting interests, as interpreted by

fallible elected politicians and honest and dishonest professional bureaucrats” (Meira Penna 1988, 5). As previously stated, Meira Penna was well acquainted with the works of Buchanan. Since Meira Penna was a classical liberal, many of the classical political theorists and economists that inspired members of the Austrian, Chicago, and Virginia schools also influenced Meira Penna’s political thought. This feature complicates the task of identifying a school’s unique influence on his political thought.

The next sections thoroughly examine Meira Penna’s *O dinossauro* for the purpose of identifying features of Meira Penna’s arguments that are distinctively Austrian. Three cases allow for a direct connection between Meira Penna’s arguments and the Austrian tradition. First, Meira Penna’s critique of constructivist rationality has a clear resemblance to Hayek’s critique (Meira Penna 1988, 93). Second, Meira Penna’s criticism of Comte’s positivism (Meira Penna 1988, 299) and Rousseau’s romanticism (Meira Penna 1988, 60) also parallels Hayek’s criticism. Finally, Meira Penna delves into Hayek’s *cosmos* and *taxis* to provide possible solutions to Brazilian constructivism; this, perhaps, evidences the strongest connection with the Austrian tradition (Meira Penna 1988, 332).

MEIRA PENNA AND FRIEDRICH HAYEK’S CRITIQUE OF CONSTRUCTIVIST RATIONALITY

In *O dinossauro*, one of the primary concerns of Meira Penna (1988, 328) is to examine “the exact origins of the strong state in Brazil, in the history of ideas.” To do so, he concerns himself with rational constructivism—a concept extensively analyzed by Hayek.

In 1970, Hayek delivered a lecture at the Paris Lodron University of Salzburg. In that lecture, Hayek raised his objection to what he called constructivism. The lecture was eventually published as *The Errors of Constructivism*. But what is constructivism? In Meira Penna’s (1988, 93) words, “Hayek called the pretense of planning man’s destiny constructivism.” In the opening of *The Errors of Constructivism*, Hayek (1978, 3) differentiates rationalism and constructivism by claiming that constructivism “in the past has often, but misleadingly, been described as rationalism.” Diamond (1980) extensively discusses Hayek’s distinction between constructivist rationalism and critical rationalism.

Hayek links the origins of the constructivist mentality to the rationalism of Descartes. Diamond (1980, 356) provides a list, partially

reproduced in table 1, which displays the different thinkers that Hayek considered constructivist rationalists and critical rationalists.

TABLE 1: DIAMOND ON HAYEK'S CONSTRUCTIVE RATIONALISTS VERSUS CRITICAL RATIONALISTS

Constructivist Rationalists	Critical Rationalists
Francis Bacon	Edmund Burke
Auguste Comte	David Hume
René Descartes	Carl Menger
Thomas Hobbes	Alexis de Tocqueville
Jean-Jacques Rousseau	Adam Smith

Source: Diamond (1980, 356).

Hayek (1978, 5) rejects the rationalism of Descartes, claiming that “from Descartes it was taken over by that unreasonable ‘Age of Reason’, which was entirely dominated by the cartesian spirit.” What concerns Hayek is not necessarily Descartes’s writings but the implications of his philosophy (which were later developed and enhanced by other writers such as Voltaire and Rousseau). Like Hayek, Meira Penna is also cautious regarding Descartes’s rationalism, arguing that Voltaire and Rousseau were developments from the Cartesian rationality.

In addition, both Hayek and Meira Penna use Voltaire as a clear representation of the Cartesian spirit of the age of reason. Meira Penna (1988, 48) mimics Hayek’s critique of constructivism in this fashion:

The apogee of what Hayek calls philosophical constructivism takes place in the 18th and 19th centuries, but the trace continues in the praxis of the present century. The Cartesian spirit applied to the social sciences can be exemplified by Voltaire’s phrase: “If you want good laws, burn those you have and make yourselves new ones.”

In this passage, Meira Penna reintroduces Hayek’s argument on the Cartesian spirit of the age of reason. Curiously, Hayek (1978, 5) also cites the same quote from Voltaire (1764). Both Hayek and Meira Penna are skeptical of blind rationalism.

Descartes introduced the idea that there is only truth when there is proof. Hayek (1978, 5) argues that a logical implication of this idea in the field of morals and values is that we “should only accept as binding what we could recognize as a rational design for a recognizable purpose.” Thus, according to Cartesians, social institutions are designed by humans and hence constructed with a goal

in mind. The fundamental question that motivates constructivism is about the origins of institutions. For instance, if one believes that a leader established society's institutions, a logical consequence is that other leaders may likewise influence and modify these institutions. If social order is not natural (cosmos) but man made (taxis), why not design it according to reason?

Meira Penna (1988, 93) observes that the will to plan and create institutions dates to the seventeenth century:

Marx was not the first to propose the radical transformation of the world: all the beautiful metaphysicians of the seventeenth century, with their velvet coats, their white wigs, and their lace cuffs, painted Courbet by offering grandiose projects and prophesying, with naïve enthusiasm, a vision of utopia with the dizzying progress of freedom in the future.

Meira Penna thereby observes that the ambition to plan and manipulate social activities did not originate with socialists. This idea was slowly introduced by Descartes, then developed by his intellectual descendants such as Voltaire, and most notably, Rousseau. This is also one of Hayek's concerns which he articulates in his major writings including *The Road to Serfdom*, *The Pretense of Knowledge*, and *The Fatal Conceit*.

Meira Penna shares Hayek's well-known arguments regarding the danger of blindly following ideas deemed scientific. In *The Pretense of Knowledge*, Hayek (1978, 30) argues that "there is as much reason to be apprehensive about the long-run dangers created in a much wider field by the uncritical acceptance of assertions which have the appearance of being scientific." In a similar manner, Meira Penna (1988, 48) highlights the dangers of uncritically following knowledge that appears scientific:

Scientific positivism in the social sciences, thus inaugurated, will spread in the following centuries to all branches of human knowledge, including the terrain controlled by jurisprudence, social sciences, and psychology. The way was thus well prepared and fertilized for the luxuriant flowering of socialism and totalitarian National Socialism, ideologies that also claim to be scientific and rooted in a positive knowledge of social reality.

Thus, Meira Penna's argument follows the same logical foundations as Hayek's position. In summary, Meira Penna agrees with Hayek's argument that there are problematic implications in applying Cartesian rationality to morals.

Hayek recognizes that Descartes did not explore the consequences of his views on political and moral problems. It was Voltaire and Rousseau who enabled the apogee of constructivism to be reached. It is possible and problematic to base rationalism on false concepts that are judged as scientific truths. A pseudorational policy can, given the a priori belief that prescribing policies based solely on reason is desirable, be considered a fundamental truth. Both Meira Penna and Hayek understand that a pseudorational policy could result in the imposition of a bureaucrat's will on individuals' liberties.

JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU, A ROMANTIC RATIONAL CONSTRUCTOR

Hayek was deeply concerned by Rousseau's philosophy. For instance, in *Individualism and Economic Order*, Hayek (1980, 4) differentiates Rousseau's individualism from traditional individualism, arguing that "rationalistic individualism always tends to develop into the opposite of individualism, namely, socialism or collectivism." Hayek saw Rousseau's ideas as a prelude to authoritarianism. Indeed, Rousseau often subjected the individuality of man to the collective life and believed that a society could not be driven by self-interest (Qvortrup 2003).

According to Rousseau, people who lived in the state of nature were not brutal beings bereft of compassion and dignity. On the contrary, Rousseau considered the savage human to be full of passion by nature while he considered the civilized human to live a troubled and corrupted life. This is the general theme of Rousseau's (2005, 55) *Discourse on the Origin and Basis of Inequality among Men*:

Nothing therefore can be more evident, than that it is society alone, which has added even to love itself as well as to all the other passions, that impetuous ardour, which so often renders it fatal to mankind; and it is so much the more ridiculous to represent savages constantly murdering each other to glut their brutality, as this opinion is diametrically opposite to experience, and the Caribbeans, the people in the world who have as yet deviated least from the state of nature, are to all intents and purposes the most peaceable in their amours, and the least subject to jealousy, though they live in a burning climate which seems always to add considerably to the activity of these passions.

Rousseau romanticizes the simplicity of the natural state and views civilized society as a dystopia because in society, humans "are obligated to compare themselves one with another" (Rousseau

2009, 106). This comparison leads to competition, rivalry, and hostility between humans. Society then becomes a futile theater for egoism and self-interest.

Hayek (1990, 49) saw Rousseau's romanticization of humans in the natural state as problematic and as the "chief source of the fatal conceit of modern intellectual rationalism that promises to lead us back to paradise where in our natural instincts rather than learnt restraints upon them will enable us 'to subdue the world', as we are instructed in the book of Genesis." Nevertheless, Meira Penna (1988, 329) observes that Hayek does not "coordinate the phenomenon of the awakening of constructivist liberalism in continental Europe" with the creation of romantic nationalism. Hayek was clearly concerned about Rousseau's ideas and their role in the creation of totalitarian ideologies. However, as Meira Penna argues, Hayek does not dedicate significant time to the analysis of the impact of Rousseau's romanticism on the development of nationalistic ideologies.

Rousseau (2009, 5) argues that civil society leaves humans worse off: "Human nature was not fundamentally better, but men found their security in the ease with which they could see through each other, and this advantage, whose value we no longer feel, spared them many vices." Rousseau sees no difference between human nature in the state of nature and human nature in civil society; however, civil society deprives humans of their ability to truly see through each other. In this sense, civil society inhibits an important aspect of human interaction. Both Hayek and Meira Penna were concerned with the romanticization of human passions because Rousseau (2009, 28) asserts that human passion improves reason; that humans desire knowledge simply because it brings enjoyment:

Let moralists say what they will, the human understanding is greatly indebted to the passions, which, on their side, are likewise universally allowed to be greatly indebted to the human understanding. It is by the activity of our passions, that our reason improves: we covet knowledge merely because we covet enjoyment, and it is impossible to conceive why a man exempt from fears and desires should take the trouble to reason.

It is precisely this exacerbation of passions that Meira Penna finds so troubling; in his view, it may lead to dangerous ideologies.

Meira Penna (1988, 65) argues that "romantic thinkers along the lines of Rousseau, Fichte, Hegel, Comte, [and] Marx, subjected reason to their passionate purposes and created ideology." Meira Penna

(1988, 65) finds this problematic because he considers ideology to be “a false theoretical construction, apparently rational but charged with incoherent and fanatical emotional energy.” Hence, if the main philosophical premise is passion, then it allows for the advancement of passionate ideologies (even those that are incoherent and dangerous).

Meira Penna argues that there is a rational process within ideologies. But if the foundation is flawed, the entire logical chain would be compromised. For instance, if one believes that social interactions are founded on power structures, it is possible to develop rational conclusions. If the assumption that power relations guide social phenomena is wrong, the arguments surrounding the false assumption can still be rational despite being compromised. Meira Penna therefore implies that passions allow for rational conclusions to be drawn based on unreasonable assumptions. This is at the heart of what Hayek (1978, 5) calls the “unreasonable Age of Reason.”

According to Hayek, one of these unreasonable assumptions appears on the first page of *The Social Contract*, where Rousseau (1913, chap. 1) claims that “man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains.” The constructivist implication of this assumption is Rousseau’s insistence that man must be freed from these chains. Hayek (1990, 49) observes that Rousseau’s ideas dominated progressive thinking and “led people to forget that freedom as a political institution had arisen not by human beings ‘striving for freedom’ in the sense of release from restraints, but by their striving for the protection of a known secure individual domain.”

That is, freedom as a political institution did not arise from humans searching for freedom, but from of their search for protection. Hayek does not romanticize the creation of civil society but instead views it as a natural and evolutionary process that guarantees individual freedom.

The rule of law imposes some constraints on human behavior, but it does not necessarily place freedom in chains. Rousseau’s ideas opened the door to the destruction of tradition and culture, leading to the construction of a new social sphere. Hayek (1990, 50) argues that Rousseau provided the intellectual means to destroy the spontaneous order:

After Rousseau gave intellectual license to throw off cultural restraints, to confer legitimacy on attempts to gain “freedom” from the restraints that had made freedom possible, and to call this attack on the foundation

of freedom “liberation”, property became increasingly suspect and was no longer so widely recognized as the key factor that had brought about the extended order.

Hayek therefore concludes that Rousseau’s ideas attack the foundations of freedom. In Hayek’s view, cultural norms, rule of law, and respect for property are natural and fundamental developments that allow political freedom to emerge in civil society. These rules permitted humans to leave the state of nature and live together in a productive and free manner.

Rousseau argues the opposite. He claims that humans were truly free in the state of nature. When civil society restrained human passion, it also restrained freedom. He also argues that cultural norms and traditions constrain freedom and should be made to be compatible with human passions. It is rational, in his view, to call for the reconstruction of all social norms so as to free humankind. However, this may be a rational conclusion drawn from an erroneous assumption.

Meira Penna (1988, 64) criticizes the destruction of the foundations of a free civil society by applying romanticism. He argues that the romantic “accepts his passions as divine and refuses to shoulder the heavy burden of ethical introversion. He wants to ‘tear down structures’ and tradition, because they are the structures of the Law and the patriarchal Superego.”

Similarly, Hayek (1990, 49) observes that “after asserting that animal instinct was a better guide to orderly cooperation among men than either tradition or reason, Rousseau invented the fictitious will of the people, or general will, through which the people becomes one single being, one individual.” This is, according to Hayek, the main source of the fatal conceit.

Rousseau (1913, chap. 6) views the general will as an “act of association creates a moral and collective body, composed of as many members as the assembly contains votes, and receiving from this act its unity, its common identity, its life and its will.” Meira Penna (1988, 84) opposes this construction, claiming that when the “general will is preached—and we often hear from demagogues loud and passionate appeals to the ‘people’ and to the ‘will of the people’!—we can be sure that the ghosts of the demagogic dictatorship are looming on the horizon.” Meira Penna is arguing that the idea of one representing the general will of the people can easily lead to authoritarianism.

Like Hayek, Meira Penna believed that romanticism sought to tear down the institutional structures that enabled the flourishing of human freedom. Hayek and Meira Penna therefore criticized rational romanticism using similar arguments. In addition, both dedicated significant time to the examination of Rousseau's political thought thereby revealing the constructivist nature of his philosophy. Hayek and Meira Penna understood the advancement of the modern progressive movement to be part of the logical sequence of Rousseau's romanticism. Furthermore, both were concerned that romanticism would undermine and deconstruct important and spontaneous cultural and institutional structures of civil society; the same structures that allowed human liberty to flourish. Given the similarity between Meira Penna's arguments and Hayek's position on constructivism, it is reasonable to conclude that Hayek played a crucial role in the formation of Meira Penna's thought. Meira Penna built on Hayek's argument to apply it to the context of Brazil.

COMTE'S POSITIVISM AND THE PRETENSE OF KNOWLEDGE

Ideology is a mixture of romanticism and rationalism. In the case of Brazil, rational romantic thought began to influence the fundamental structures of society in the form of Comte's positivism. When applied to politics, Comte's positivism calls for a society that resigns metaphysical beliefs and allows only science and reason as methods to ascertain truth. In this sense, positivists believed that social interactions were bound by laws such as those found in the natural sciences. Faria and Subrick (2020, 6) observe that "although largely forgotten in Europe, Comtian positivism became a leading ideology within Brazilian politics." Beyond politics, Comte's ideas became popular within the Brazilian military.

The Brazilian military sponsored a coup d'état in 1889, removing Emperor Dom Pedro II from power and making Brazil a republic. The coup d'état was facilitated by the lack of a clear successor to Dom Pedro II and the elites' discontentment (Faria and Subrick 2020). Comtian positivism was the leading ideology after the coup d'état. Meira Penna saw the development of positivism in Brazil as an unfortunate event. He claimed that "Comte's positivism, conservative and authoritarian, which in Brazil, with the republican revolution, turned into a kind of scientific Jesuitism"

(Meira Penna 1988, 299). Meira Penna is referring to the reconstruction of Brazilian society after the 1889 coup d'état.

The republicans, driven by positivist ideology, tried to rearrange every social structure that was not deemed scientific. This scientific inquisition reshaped the foundations of the country. The revolution started with the Brazilian flag, which today contains the positivist inspired motto *Ordem e progresso*. However, as Faria and Subrick (2020) observe, although the Brazilian institutions endured a robust institutional change, the positivists were not able to implement centralization of power. They just returned to power later with Getúlio Vargas who established a positivist dictatorship.

The overuse of science is a development that can be troubling in the social sphere. Hayek expands on this concern in his writings. Harnish (2020, 180) observes that “Hayek connects an exaggerated faith in the ability of human reason and science, originating with certain Enlightenment thinkers, to a variety of modern problems ranging from behaviorism in psychology to positivism in economics to bureaucratic planning in government.” Meira Penna, like Hayek, is critical of the overuse of the scientific method in social sciences and identifies rational constructivism as an inherent problem in the Brazilian political mentality. Meira Penna (1988, 24) argues that this constructivist idea was widespread in Brazil and eventually led to the development of the Brazilian paternalistic state:

Greater science or an increase in conscience carries the danger of vanity and pride, obsession with power, megalomania or what theologians usually condemn as the sin of *Superbia*. The new knowledge from the Age of Reason, of which the cartesian *Cogito* constituted the supreme formula, explains the ominous occurrence of this inflationary symptom.

The overuse of science may inflate the confidence of the bureaucratic apparatus in its ability to address social problems. It is with the exacerbation of scientific knowledge that early positivists in Brazil attempted to reconstruct the social sphere.

Faria and Subrick (2020) observe that Hayek saw Comte's positivism as a collectivist view of society in which individuals are unimportant and society itself is a single collective being. The collectivist nature of positivism is easily connected to Rousseau's notion of “general will.” The idea that society somehow possesses a will of its own is a common idea between Rousseau and Comte. Meira Penna perceives that Comte's positivism has an authoritarian

nature and that the application of Comte's positivism in Brazil is the apogee of religious fanaticism of reason and science.

THE LIBERAL ORDER IN BRAZIL

In *O dinossauro*, Meira Penna attempts to track the philosophical foundation of the Brazilian state in the history of ideas. Meira Penna (1988, 329) advances the thesis that the "origin of the suffocating social-statism that ravages the modern world, is the 'synthetic' product of the dialectical antithesis of reason and passion." This is the true genesis of the nonspontaneous order in Brazil. Meira Penna argues that the mixture of rationalism and romanticism resulted in the creation of Brazilian paternalistic institutions.

As Barroso and de Souza (2013) observe, Meira Penna believed that Brazilians should spontaneously overcome the paternalistic mentality. The influence of rationalism and romanticism, mostly through Comte's positivism, led to an intellectual foundation that was primarily romantic; therefore, the population sees the paternalistic state not as an inherent problem, but as a reasonable way to promote a Brazilian version of Rousseau's "general will."

Meira Penna's Austrian perspective becomes evident in his proposed solution to the problem of the bureaucratic state. Brazil's intellectual foundation is not compatible with the development of a liberal society. However, Meira Penna does not suggest a constructivist solution. He spends a significant portion of his work criticizing constructivism; therefore, it would be inconsistent to propose a reconstruction of the Brazilian social order. Meira Penna (1988, 332) recognizes this problem: "Repeating Hayek, we still know very little about the laws that control social development to sponsor plans, programs, or projects of a totalitarian character. We cannot obey supposed 'social laws' that are not subject to our control." Meira Penna accordingly does not propose any constructivist plan to reform the Brazilian social order. However, this does not mean that Brazilians cannot change the course of their current paternalistic state. Meira Penna suggests that Brazilians possess the means to spontaneously change their mentality by adopting Hayek's liberal order (cosmos) and abandoning the planned interventionist and paternalistic order (taxis).

Meira Penna argues that the primary characteristic of the liberal order is its opposition to constructivism and planning. When Meira Penna wrote *O dinossauro*, Brazil was changing from a military

dictatorship to a democracy. For this reason, Meira Penna (1988, 332) emphatically argues that liberal principles are important for the future of Brazil:

These principles are especially valid in a young nation like Brazil where everything remains to be done, where the social structure itself is still in a state of formless plasticity. The essence of the principle of conservative liberalism is, by definition, the freedom of competition for proposed solutions, provided that they do not aim at monopolization, cartelization, and exclusivism. It's the experiment.

Although Brazil experienced many constructivist projects like the coup d'état that led to the proclamation of the republic in 1889, the Vargas Era, and the military regime, Brazil's institutions did not long persist. Meira Penna (1988, 122) observes that "constantly, in 1930, 1937, 1950, 1956, 1964, and again, 1986, the socializing, inefficient, and centralizing patrimonial state has emerged reinforced from such skirmishes." Meira Penna argues that the changes imposed by different regimes made the problem worse. According to Meira Penna, a solution is only possible if individuals decide to change their mentality and engage in free competition over solutions to the challenges faced by Brazil.

CONCLUSION

Meira Penna was one of the few Brazilian political thinkers to adopt an openly liberal position. He often emphasized the importance of the works by major economists such as Friedman, Buchanan, Mises, and Hayek. He regretted that the works of these economists were not popular in Brazil. Given the vast intellectual influence that these different thinkers had on Meira Penna's political thought, it is often difficult to identify whose ideas primarily influenced him.

When questioned on the podcast *Mises Brasil*, Meira Penna (2013) claimed that the economists Friedman, Mises, and Hayek were the major authors that marked his intellectual journey. However, in *O dinossauro* it is Hayek's work that is the foundation of Meira Penna's argument. Meira Penna's work not only revisits ideas found in Hayek's essays but also expands upon them.

Like Hayek, Meira Penna saw the uncritical trust in reason as problematic. Meira Penna did not consider the development of the Cartesian mentality to be a positive phenomenon. The apogee of

the Cartesian mentality is found in Rousseau's philosophy. Hayek was critical of Rousseau, but Meira Penna criticized Rousseau's philosophy to an even greater extent. Meira Penna argued that the combination of rationalism and romanticism led to the creation of totalitarian ideologies like socialism and National Socialism.

After exploring the problems of the constructivist mentality, Meira Penna brought the discussion to Brazil by applying Hayek's arguments to the Brazilian context. He argued that the constructivist mentality primarily entered Brazil through Comte's positivism. Since the coup d'état in 1889, Brazil has been unable to establish an environment that fosters markets and individual action. Instead, Brazil developed a bureaucratic paternalistic state grounded in a romantic constructivist mentality. Meira Penna concluded that true and lasting change is only possible if Brazilians spontaneously decide to promote a liberal order.

Meira Penna's *O dinossauro* is a rare case in which the Austrian school's principles are applied to Brazil during the twentieth century. By developing Hayek's critique of rational constructivism and applying it to Brazil, Meira Penna compiles a strong Austrian analysis of the institutional foundations of Brazil. Meira Penna's work should be understood by historians of ideas as a robust classical liberal critique of the Brazilian Leviathan.

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