Metaphilosophy: Defining Latin American and Latinx Philosophy

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Introduction

Some of the central questions that have been explored by Latin American and Latinx philosophers are questions of *metaphilosophy*. "Metaphilosophy" refers to philosophical reflections on the nature of philosophy itself. For example, we might ask: What is the purpose of doing philosophy? How does philosophy compare and contrast with other disciplines, such as science, theology, or literature? And what is the best way of categorizing the different kinds and traditions of philosophy? These are philosophical questions about philosophy as an activity and as a discipline.

In this chapter, we discuss some ways that Latin American and Latinx philosophers have addressed these and other metaphilosophical issues. Our focus will be on the following questions: *What are the defining characteristics of "Latin American philosophy" and "Latinx philosophy"? Do they constitute distinctive traditions of philosophy, and if so, what is especially valuable about these traditions?* In section one, we begin by examining the views of philosophers who are skeptical of Latin American philosophy. Many of these writers argue that the philosophy that has been produced in Latin America is not original or authentic enough to constitute a distinctive philosophical tradition that can stand alongside other, more established traditions of philosophy, such as ancient Greek philosophy and European philosophy. In section two, we examine the opposing views of those who defend Latin American philosophy as an original, authentic, and distinctively valuable tradition of thought. In section three, we turn to similar questions that have been raised about the nature of Latinx philosophy.

As we will see, metaphilosophical writings on the nature of Latin American and Latinx philosophy shed light on a number of other issues, such as Latin American and Latinx identity and the legacy of colonialism. And the inquiry is not over: Latin American and Latinx philosophy are alive today and continue to evolve, even as we speak of them. Thus, this chapter does not aim to provide any definitive answers to these questions. Instead, we hope that this

chapter will help to orient, challenge, and inspire philosophers to reflect on—and even participate in shaping—the future of Latin American and Latinx philosophy.

The Questions of Originality and Authenticity

Let us begin with a metaphilosophical examination of Latin American philosophy. Our central question here is: *What are the defining characteristics of Latin American philosophy?* One way that Latin American philosophers have addressed this question is to examine the philosophy that has been produced by Latin American thinkers and try to identify common characteristics of this philosophy that are *original* and *authentic*. In other words, they have broken this question down into two more specific questions:

- *The Question of Originality*—When we look at the philosophy produced in Latin America, what, if anything, can be identified that is significantly different from what can be found in other philosophical traditions?
- *The Question of Authenticity*—When we look at the philosophy produced in Latin America, what, if anything, can be identified that is distinctively Latin American—i.e., an organic expression of the unique life-experiences, concerns, styles, and perspectives of the people of Latin America?

The Questions of Originality and Authenticity are usually framed by comparing the philosophy produced in Latin America to the philosophy produced in Europe and, more recently, the U.S. In this way, these questions reflect a worry that some Latin American philosophers have shared: Is the philosophy that has been produced in Latin America merely an imitation of European or Anglo-American philosophy?

The Skeptics

A provocative challenge for Latin American philosophers

Writing in the 1920s, a century after the Peruvian War of Independence from Spain, the Peruvian philosopher José Carlos Mariátegui hoped that Latin American philosophy would develop into a world-renowned philosophical tradition.[1] However, Mariátegui worried that excessive optimism about the challenges faced by Latin America would make Latin Americans complacent. In order to inspire his fellow Latin American philosophers to work hard to live up to their potential,

Mariátegui articulated the Questions of Originality and Authenticity in a deliberately provocative and challenging way. He asked: Does a Latin American tradition of philosophy *even exist*?

In his 1924 essay, "Is There Such a Thing as Hispanic-American Thought?" Mariátegui warns that it would be premature to claim that a distinctive tradition of thought had developed in Latin America. The reason, he argues, is that in spite of the political independence from Europe that had been achieved in Latin America and elsewhere, Europe still had a pervasive and profound influence on Latin American philosophy. He explains:

> The existence in Western culture of French thought, of German thought, seems evident to me. The existence of Hispanic-American thought in the same sense does not seem equally evident. All the thinkers of our America have been educated in European schools. The spirit of the race is not felt in their work. The continent's intellectual production lacks its own characteristics. It does not have an original profile. Hispanic-American thought is generally only a rhapsody composed from the motifs and elements of European thought.[2]

Over forty years later, a similarly skeptical view of Latin American philosophy was deployed by fellow Peruvian philosopher Augusto Salazar Bondy. In his essay, "The Meaning and Problem of Hispanic American Thought" (1969), Salazar Bondy chronicles European influence over the course of Latin America's intellectual history:

> ...what we find in all our countries is a succession of imported doctrines, a procession of systems which follows European, or, in general, foreign unrest. It is almost a succession of intellectual fashions without roots in our spiritual life and, for this very reason, lacking the virtue of fertility…. For this reason these systems were abandoned as quickly and easily as they were embraced, having been chosen by the upper class and the intellectual sectors of Hispanic Americans according to their immediate preferences and momentary affinities. To review the process of Hispanic American philosophy is to relate the passing of Western philosophy *through* our countries, or to narrate European philosophy *in* Hispanic America. It is not to tell the history of a natural philosophy *of* Hispanic America. In our historical process there are Cartesians, Krausists, Spencerians, Bergsonians, and other European "*isms*." But this is all; there are no creative figures to

> found and nurture their own peculiar tradition, nor native philosophic "*isms*." We search for the original contributions of our countries in answer to the Western challenge—or to that of other cultures—and we do not find it.[3]

Salazar Bondy concludes that in the philosophy that has been produced in Latin America, there is an absence of an original and authentic *style* of philosophical inquiry—or as he puts it, an "[*a*]*bsence of a characteristic, definitive tendency*, and of an ideological, conceptual proclivity capable of founding a tradition of thought" (*MP,* 388).

The lack of originality and authenticity that characterizes Latin American philosophy, Salazar Bondy argues, is a result of the fact that Latin American philosophers have been alienated from the rest of their communities.

> *There has existed permanently in Hispanic America a great distance between those who practice philosophy and the whole of the community.* There is no way to consider our philosophies of national thought, with a differential seal, as one speaks of a German, French, English, or Greek philosophy. It is almost impossible for the community to recognize itself in these philosophies, precisely because we are dealing with transplanted thought, the spiritual products of other men and other cultures, which a refined minority makes an effort to understand and to share. (*MP,* 389)

From his perspective, philosophical works must represent the communities out of which they emerge if they are to be authentic. People should recognize themselves—their own history, struggles, and concerns—when they read these works. Instead, Salazar Bondy finds that there is a gulf between the philosophy that is being produced by a small number of elites in Latin America and the vast majority of people who live there. In his words:

> The distance between those who practice philosophy and the community at large is in this case—unlike the normal relationship between the specialist and the public—the abyss between the enlightened elite who live according to a foreign model, and the illiterate, poverty-stricken masses, trapped in the framework of remote and sclerotic traditions. (*MP,* 396)

Thus, according to Salazar Bondy, philosophy throughout the history of Latin America has not emerged from the lived experience of Latin American people but, rather, has been transplanted

from another culture. As he puts it, "It has been a plagiarized novel and not the truthful chronicle of our human adventure" (*MP,* 392).

Deeper connections between philosophy, culture, and colonization

If this skeptical view of Latin American philosophy is correct, we might wonder: Why would philosophers in Latin America have drawn from European philosophy so heavily, rather than seeking inspiration in the perspectives and insights within their own communities?

In answer to this question, Mariátegui argues that although Latin American countries had achieved political independence from European colonizers, Latin American people were still culturally subordinate to Europe and had yet to achieve an independent sense of identity. In his view, the blending of races—European and indigenous—that occurred in the Americas during the process of colonization had not succeeded in creating a people with a "new soul."[4] Instead, Mariátegui argues that in most Latin American countries, the elite have sought to adopt European ways of thinking and living, while the people and elements of culture that are more closely associated with indigeneity have been denied the highest levels of political and cultural expression. Thus, in his assessment, "The elements of our nationality in formation have not yet been fused or welded."[5] In order for there to be a characteristically Latin American tradition of philosophy, he argues, there needs to be distinctive Latin American peoples, and such a people has not yet emerged.

Like Mariátegui before him, Salazar Bondy contends that the reason that Latin American philosophy has not authentically reflected Latin American culture is that, in fact, there is no authentic Latin American culture. He writes: "A defective and illusory philosophic conscience causes one to suspect the existence of a defective and unauthentic social being, the lack of a culture in the strong and proper sense of the term… This is the case in Hispanic America" (*MP,* 394-95). Salazar Bondy adds that, on his view, the reason that Latin America does not have an authentic culture is that colonialism and economic dependence have inhibited its proper development. He explains, "As dependents of Spain, England, or the United States, we have been and continue to be underdeveloped—if I may use the expression—*under* these powers, and, consequently, countries with a *culture of domination*" (*MP* 395).

In spite of these findings, both Mariátegui and Salazar Bondy held out hope that philosophy in Latin America would become original and authentic in the future. According to Salazar Bondy, however, this will only be possible if Latin American philosophers focus on their distinctive circumstances:

> Philosophy in Hispanic America has a possibility of being authentic in the midst of the unauthenticity that surrounds and consumes it, and to convert itself into the lucid awareness of this condition and into the thought capable of unleashing the process to overcome it. It must be a meditation *about* our anthropological status and *from* our own negative status, with a view to its cancellation. (*MP* 397)

In other words, Salazar Bondy argues that in order to be authentic, Latin American philosophy will need to consist of reflections about the unique social, historical, and political circumstances in Latin America, with the aim of eliminating the negative conditions that have kept Latin American people from achieving an authentic existence. In fact, he says, philosophy could actually be a site in which the people of Latin America transcend their condition of subordination and begin to imagine new ways of living. As he puts it, "Being the focus of man's total awareness, [philosophy] could, better than other spiritual creations, be that part of humanity that rises above itself, and overcomes the negativity of the present as it moves toward new and superior forms of reality" (*MP*, 397). In this way, Salazar Bondy hopes that the formation of an authentic Latin American philosophical tradition—together with greater economic independence in the region—could provide an essential impetus for the emergence of an authentic Latin American culture.

Two related metaphilosophical questions

As we have seen, it would be a mistake to assume that those who are skeptical of the originality and authenticity of Latin American philosophy are merely naysayers seeking to diminish the accomplishments of others. Instead, skeptics like Mariátegui and Salazar Bondy are motivated by a sincere belief in the greater potential of Latin American philosophy and culture, and in the course of presenting their provocative analyses, they develop some creative and thought-provoking views of their own on topics such as the connections between philosophy, culture, and colonization.

Let us highlight two other areas in which those who raise doubts about Latin American philosophy have made significant philosophical contributions. The first area concerns the question of how philosophy itself should be defined. This issue was addressed by the Argentine philosopher Risieri Frondizi in his 1949 essay, "Is There an Ibero-American Philosophy?" Frondizi begins this essay by putting forward a skeptical view of Latin American philosophy, saying, "Up to the present, Ibero-American philosophy is simply the rethinking of the European problems that have reached our shores."[6] This view should be familiar to us by now (for a related discussion of Frondizi's essay, see chapter 5). But in the course of supporting his conclusion, Frondizi takes a different route, and he encounters a fascinating and difficult question of metaphilosophy, which we can call the Question of Form and Purpose.

- *The Question of Form and Purpose*—Is the purpose of philosophical writing different from the purpose of other kinds of writing, such as poetry and literature? If so, should philosophical writing take on a distinctive form that is suited to its distinctive purpose?

The way we answer the Question of Form and Purpose will influence how we answer the Questions of Originality and Authenticity. After all, Latin American *literature* is widely admired as being both original and authentic, and at least some of this literature addresses philosophical issues in insightful ways. For example, the Argentine author Jorge Luis Borges (1899-1986) wrote short stories and poems that take up positions held by well-known philosophers throughout history and suggest novel approaches to traditional philosophical questions about topics such as the nature of time, infinity, memory, writing, and religion. The same could be said of many other Latin Americans whose writings are philosophical but do not fit the traditional Western philosophical mold. Thus, if this sort of writing counts as genuine philosophy, then this gives us reason to conclude that an original and authentic tradition of Latin American philosophy already exists.

Frondizi argues, however, that we ought to make a sharp distinction between philosophy and poetry, literature, political speeches, and other non-philosophical forms. Genuine philosophy, he says, is presented in a way that prioritizes philosophical concerns. Thus, philosophy aims for clarity of argumentation and analysis, while, in contrast, the writings of poets, novelists, and

statesmen are shaped by other concerns and goals, such as creating beauty, telling a good story, or nation-building. As Frondizi puts it,

> it is undeniable that the works of [the Latin American authors] Sarmiento, Bello, or Martí—to mention three great examples—contain philosophical ideas. But such ideas appear as a result of literary or political concerns to which they remain subordinated. In none of them does philosophy have an independent status; none of them set forth philosophical problems motivated by philosophical interests. We are, of course, not reproaching them for this; their work fills us with satisfaction and admiration…. We only wish to point out what seems an undeniable fact: that philosophy has been subordinated to non-philosophical interests.[7]

After making this sharp distinction between philosophy and non-philosophy—and thus setting aside the work of any Latin American writer who does not write in a traditional philosophical form, regardless of how creative or insightful it may be—Frondizi concludes that Latin American philosophy lacks both originality and authenticity.

Frondizi's answer to the Question of Form and Purpose may not persuade everyone; indeed, we will examine some opposing views shortly. But by clearly articulating this question and showing its connection to the larger questions about the defining characteristics of Latin American philosophy, Frondizi's article makes an important contribution to the ongoing conversation about the relationship of philosophy to other disciplines of thought.

Another, related area in which skeptics of Latin American philosophy have made positive philosophical contributions concerns a question about how to understand what sort of activity philosophizing is supposed to be and what philosophy can hope to achieve. We can call this the Question of Universality.

- *The Question of Universality* — Is philosophy best understood as the search for absolute truths which are valid for all people at all times? If so, then what sense does it make to talk about the philosophy of a cultural group, e.g. the philosophy of Latin America?

The Question of Universality has been of interest to philosophers for centuries in both Latin America and Europe. One scholar to pose this question as it relates to Latin American philosophy is U.S. philosopher Vicente Medina. In his 1992 article, "The Possibility of an

Indigenous Philosophy: A Latin American Perspective," Medina defends a *universalist* view of philosophy, arguing that philosophy seeks to discover universal truths. He thus rejects the *historicist* view that philosophy is best understood as the articulation of the various worldviews of individuals and cultures throughout history. The upshot of Medina's argument in favor of universalism is that the skeptics are correct that there is no such thing as Latin American philosophy. The reason is that, on his view, philosophy is, in all cases, universal, and so philosophizing is not inherently tied in any way to a particular society, culture, or historical situation.

To better understand what is at stake in the debate between the universalist and the historicist, let us compare philosophy to two other activities—mathematics and cooking. According to the historicist, philosophy is like cooking, insofar as both activities tend to reflect the historical and cultural context of practitioners. For example, Mexican cuisine is shaped by the unique foods that are grown in Mexico, as well as the distinctive culinary techniques, styles, and tastes of Mexican culture across time. Likewise, the historicist argues, we should expect Latin American philosophy to reflect the distinctive features of the historical and cultural context of Latin American philosophers.

According to universalists like Medina, however, philosophy is more like mathematics. Mathematics is a universal language that allows those who speak it to transcend their concrete, historical situation. After all, "2+2=4" is equally true in all cultures and all times, and such mathematical truths do not seem to reflect the historical or cultural position of the mathematicians who discover them. From this perspective, there is no such thing as *Latin American mathematics*, because Latin American mathematicians cannot put their own distinctive spin on mathematical truths like "2+2=4". Likewise, Medina argues that philosophy seeks to discover principles—such as the laws of logic—that are transcultural and objective, and which any person can recognize to be true.

According to Medina, when Plato argues for his theory of the state, or Descartes offers his theory of knowledge, these philosophers are seeking to articulate universal truths.[8] Indeed, all genuinely philosophical activity, he says, involves presenting arguments and defending them with reasons

that are, in principle, accessible to anyone, and which we can understand and evaluate without knowledge of the philosopher's cultural context. Accordingly, Medina describes his view of philosophy this way:

> One may partly understand by the nature of philosophical inquiry the activity of being critical and thus argumentative. This means that philosophers present arguments and defend them with reasons. These reasons are universally open to inspection to anyone who wants to assess them. Both reasons and arguments may be assessed according to the principles of sound reasoning: coherence, clarity, and the weight of evidence.[9]

On this basis, Medina presses a critique of historicism. He argues that if the historicist believes that philosophy merely aims to discover *relative* (not absolute) *truths*—i.e., basic principles that are valid only within a particular historical and cultural context—then this relativism is self-contradictory: One cannot both advocate for the value of a relativist position in universalist terms while rejecting universalism as the ultimate arbiter of truth. As he puts it, if historicists were to defend their view of philosophy against the universalist view,

> they would be compelled to appeal at least to some nonarbitrary principle of adjudication in order to establish their point. But if this were to be the case, then they would actually be supporting, instead of undermining, my argument in favor of [universalism].... Either they abide by the principles of sound reasoning...and, therefore, provide ammunition for my argument against their...position. Or they give up the principles of sound reasoning and, therefore, give up the notion of reasonable argumentation altogether.[10]

Again, while Medina's argument may not persuade everyone, it certainly enriches the ongoing discussion about the nature of philosophy—and presents a serious challenge for those who would like to defend the existence of Latin American tradition of philosophical thought.

A deflated conception of Latin American philosophy

In light of the skeptical views we have considered, we may wonder whether it is fruitless to search for characteristics that make the Latin American philosophical tradition different from other traditions and authentic to the unique circumstances of the Latin American community. Perhaps this idea of an original and authentic tradition of Latin American philosophy is

"inflated" and overly idealistic. If so, then maybe the best way to define this tradition is simply to say: Latin American philosophy is *the philosophy that has been produced in Latin America*.

This "deflated" view of Latin American philosophy is defended by the U.S. philosopher Jorge J.E. Gracia. According to Gracia, Latin American philosophy is simply the philosophy of the Latin American *ethnos*—that is, the philosophy produced by people of Latin American decent.[11] If Gracia is correct that Latin American philosophy should be defined simply in terms of the ethnic group that produces it, then we should not expect there to be any particular view, perspective, or style that characterizes this tradition. An ethnic group, Gracia says, is like an enormous extended family, and just as with any family, there may not be any particular features that all members share. In a similar way, Gracia argues, we should not expect to find anything more than a relatively vague "family resemblance" that unites the work of Latin American philosophers (compare to Gracia's view of Hispanic identity, as discussed in the previous chapter).

> My view does not identify what characterizes Latin American philosophers because Latin American philosophers, just like the members of my family, have no property that characterizes all of them at all times and places, even if they have all sorts of properties that characterize some of them at some times or places. Indeed, consider such examples as Las Casas, Sor Juana, Mariátegui, Ingenieros, and Frondizi. Many efforts have been undertaken to find such common properties, and so far they have failed. In my view, this search should be abandoned because it is based on a misunderstanding of the familial-historical character of ethne and their cultural products.[12]

Gracia's deflated conception of Latin American philosophy may be appealing to those who are skeptical regarding our ability to identify characteristics of the Latin American philosophical tradition that are original and authentic. Gracia's view highlights the diversity of Latin American philosophers, who, while sharing aspects of a common cultural background, have a wide variety of views and approaches to philosophy. This kind of skepticism about Latin American philosophy is not "negative" or destructive but, rather, is grounded in a celebration of the diversity of Latin American philosophy, which makes it impossible to characterize the work of Latin American philosophers in any simplistic way—as original *or* unoriginal, authentic *or* inauthentic.

The Defenders

In the previous section, we examined the work of philosophers who doubt that the philosophy that has been produced in Latin American constitutes an original and authentic philosophical tradition. We saw that in the course of making their arguments, these skeptics identified several fascinating metaphilosophical questions regarding philosophy's relationship to truth, history, culture, and other disciplines of thought. In this section, we examine some ways that these same questions have been addressed by philosophers who believe that, contrary to what the skeptics claim, there *does* exist a distinctive Latin American tradition of philosophy that is both original and authentic.

As we will see, each of these philosophers are put in a position in which they must reflect critically on why the existence of Latin American philosophy was called into question in the first place. We might even say that these philosophers are forced to engage in "meta-metaphilosophy"—that is, philosophical inquiry about why certain metaphilosophical questions about the nature of philosophy in general, and Latin American philosophy in particular, have appeared to be important or vexing to so many philosophers. In this way, defenders of Latin American philosophy try to reclaim the metaphilosophical debate over the existence of Latin American philosophy as constituting a distinctive line of inquiry that, ironically, actually *contributes* to the originality and authenticity of the Latin American philosophical tradition.

Liberation as the central concern of the tradition

U.S. philosopher Ofelia Schutte argued in 1987 that a distinctively Latin American tradition of philosophy exists, and that this tradition consists of "philosophical studies addressing issues of significance to Latin America's social, cultural, and political history and identity."[13] In particular, she says, Latin American philosophy is characterized by a concern for freedom from oppression, a concern that reflects Latin America's history of struggle with colonial and post-colonial domination.

> …[T]here is one primary reality pervading the thought of every Latin American philosopher. This is the issue of dependence and independence. Latin America is not just a different part of the world relative to Europe and North America; it is a dependent part

> of the world. Moreover, dependence—in terms of power—is translatable into subordination. So while the Latin American philosopher "thinks being" historically in terms of historical being, the structure of the historical situation meeting human reflection is one of vulnerability seeking strength, of dependence striving for freedom from domination. (*LAP*, 25)

Schutte argues that when we look at the work of Latin American philosophers within this framework, it becomes possible "to unite a plurality of perspectives and methods which otherwise might not appear to be interrelated" (*LAP*, 26)—and to see this unity as an authentic expression of the Latin American experience.

In fact, Schutte argues, the failure to perceive the common concern for freedom from oppression that underlies and unites so much of Latin American philosophy reflects a Eurocentric bias and a kind of "colonial reasoning." For example, she says, consider three prominent schools of thought in Latin America: "the theology of liberation, the secular theories of human rights, and the various forms of Marxism found in Latin America today" (*LAP,* 26). If we do not see these schools as unified in their underlying concern for liberation from oppression, they would appear to be "three separate schools of thought, each deriving its philosophical status from its origins outside Latin America" (*LAP*, 26). She continues:

> Liberation theology would be traced back to the theology of Roman Catholicism, human rights theory would be traced to the Enlightenment, and Marxist theories to European, or more recently, Soviet and Chinese versions of Marxism. In other words, each theory would be judged only as a reflection or copy of something originating outside the continent. But from the standpoint I am...employing, we can see how these three different and distinct schools of thought, modified by certain historical realities in Latin America, lead to a new unified theory of value according to the common element they all address: namely, the question of the historical and cultural interrelationship of Latin America to the rest of the world, the issue of dependence and independence of Latin America vis-à-vis the rest of the world. (*LAP*, 26)

Schutte adds that many of the most prominent Latin American philosophers address the distinctive ways that conflicts surrounding Latin American identity have shaped the struggle for independence in the region. For example, she says, what we see when we look at the work of the

Mexican philosopher Octavio Paz, the Caribbean philosopher Frantz Fanon, or the Argentine philosopher Andrés Roig, is this:

> ...variations on the theme of how to free oneself from the heritage of inequality and exploitation originating with the Conquest and colonialism. Despite almost five hundred years of assimilation into Western European tradition, many Latin Americans still feel the conflict provoked by the *conquistadores'* subjugation and extermination of millions of Indians who dwelt in the region. The Indians have come to symbolize the ancient, exploited, maternal heritage of the Americans, in contradistinction to the technologically advanced, civilized, foreign conqueror. How to resolve this tension in an unalienated and authentic manner is one of the challenges of Latin American philosophy today. (*LAP*, 27)

From this perspective, even the work of skeptics like Mariátegui and Salazar Bondy—who worry that Latin American philosophy is derivative of European or Anglo-American philosophy—reflect a struggle to achieve independence and an "unalienated" identity, a struggle that Schutte argues is a distinctive feature of Latin American philosophy. If this is correct, then, ironically, the skeptics' worry about the inauthenticity of Latin American culture is itself an authentic expression of the life-experiences, concerns, and perspectives of the Latin American community.

A defense of historicism

One of the most notable thinkers to make a case for the existence of an original and authentic Latin American philosophical tradition was the Mexican philosopher Leopoldo Zea. In his 1948 article, "The Actual Function of Philosophy in Latin America," Zea offers an especially insightful analysis of the Question of Universality.

In his article, Zea defends a historicist view of philosophy against the universalist view. In his defense of historicism, Zea acknowledges that philosophy often engages with abstract questions that are universal, in the sense that every person and culture must address them. However, he insists that Latin American philosophers can offer their own distinctive perspective on these universal issues, a perspective grounded in their distinctive life-experiences.

> Among such issues are those of being, knowledge, space, time, God, life, death, etc. A Latin American philosophy can collaborate with Western culture by attempting to resolve the problems posed by the issues that European philosophy has not been able to resolve,

> or to which it has failed to find a satisfactory solution…. The abstract issues will have to be seen from the Latin American man's own circumstance. Each man will see in such issues what is closest to his own circumstance. He will look at these issues from the standpoint of his own interests, and those interests will be determined by his way of life, his abilities and inabilities, in a word, by his own circumstance. In the case of Latin America, his contribution to the philosophy of such issues will be permeated by the Latin American circumstance. Hence, when we [Latin Americans] address abstract issues, we shall formulate them as issues of our own. Even though being, God, etc., are issues appropriate for every man, the solution to them will be given from a Latin American standpoint. We may not say what these issues mean for every man, but we can say what they mean for us Latin Americans. Being, God, death, etc., would be what these abstractions mean for us.[14]

In this passage, Zea argues that all philosophy represents—consciously or unconsciously—the particular historical circumstances of the philosopher. Thus, on his view, all works of Latin American philosophers will express the their own particular concerns, perspective, and style of thinking: "The Latin American element will be present in spite of our philosophers' attempts at objectivity. It will be present despite our thinkers' attempt to depersonalize it" (*FPLA*, 365).

Zea adds that because Latin American philosophy has been relatively marginalized within the discipline, it contains untapped philosophical resources that could become the source of new life for the discipline, and indeed, for Western culture as a whole. If so, then Latin American philosophers have an opportunity—and perhaps a responsibility—to help shape the future of both philosophy and world history.

> From this we can infer yet another goal for a possible Latin American philosophy. The Western culture of which we are children and heirs needs new values on which to rest. These new values will have to be derived from new human experiences, that is, from the experiences that result from men being in the new circumstances of today. Because of its particular situation, Latin America can contribute to culture with the novelty of untapped experiences. That is why it is necessary that it tell its truth to the world. But it must be a truth without pretensions, a sincere truth. Latin America should not pretend to be the director of Western culture; what it must aspire to do is to produce culture purely and

> simply. And that can be accomplished by attempting to resolve the problems that are posed to the Latin American man by his own Latin American perspective. (*FPLA*, 367)

Zea suggests, for example, that Latin American philosophers are well situated to contribute to our philosophical understanding of how to resolve the tension between human individuality and sociality.

> Latin American philosophy must begin the task of searching for the values that will provide the basis for a future type of culture. And this task will be carried out with the purpose of safekeeping the human essence: that which makes a man a man. Now, man is essentially an individual who is at the same time engaged in interaction with others, and hence it is necessary to maintain a balance between these two components of his essence. This is the balance that has been upset to the point of leading man to extremes: individualism to the point of anarchy, and social existence to the point of massification. Hence it is imperative to find values that make social interaction possible without detriment to individuality. (*FPLA*, 367-68)

In this article, Zea does not clarify how he envisions Latin American philosophers contributing to this particular philosophical line of inquiry, but taken as a whole, his work suggests that when Latin American philosophers set out to address universal questions, they will start with the challenges posed by the historical legacy of colonization and conquest that characterizes Latin American history, and for this reason, they will be in a unique position to offer original and authentic insights into these universal philosophical questions. For example, when addressing the tension between the individual and society, Latin American philosophers will be in a position to interpret this issue in terms of economic, political, and cultural relations of dependence and independence. In this way, they can offer a distinctive, politically oriented perspective on longstanding philosophical concerns.

Opening the borders of the discipline

In her essay "Is 'Latin American Thought' Philosophy?" (2003), U.S. philosopher Susana Nuccetelli takes up each of the metaphilosophical questions we have discussed in order to defend the claim that the existing body of works by Latin American philosophers is, indeed, part of a distinctive philosophical tradition. To help to settle the issue, Nuccetelli proposes some basic

criteria that she hopes both sides can agree on: "A philosophical work is *characteristically* Latin American if and only if:

> (1) it offers original philosophical arguments, and
>
> (2) it shows that its philosophical topics are in part determined by the relation its proponent bears to social and/or historical factors in Latin America."[15]

Criterion (1) is that of originality, and criterion (2) is what Nuccetelli calls "sensitivity to the environment," or what we might think of as a concern with authenticity. If we accept these criteria, Nuccetelli claims, then we find a robust body of philosophical work—including works by Mariátegui, Martí, and Sarmiento, as well as the 16th Century Spanish historian and Dominican friar Bartolomé de Las Casas (chapter 2), self-taught scholar and poet Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (chapter 8), the Venezuelan political leader Simón Bolívar (chapter 3), and the Uruguayan essayist Enrique Rodó, to name a few—who each score high in both criteria.

However, Nuccetelli does not stop there. On her view, many more authors should be included in the tradition of Latin American philosophy, even though they did not write in standard philosophical prose (for a related discussion, see chapter 8). Nuccetelli thus takes up the Question of Form and Purpose.

Recall Frondizi's argument that many of the great works in Latin America do not count as philosophy because the thought contained within these works is subordinated to non-philosophical interests, such as literary or political concerns. In response, Nuccetelli offers a kind of argument known as a *reductio ad absurdum*—a kind of argument which aims to show that a certain premise leads to an absurd conclusion. She argues that if we accept Frondizi's criterion of form and purpose, then much of what we currently consider to be canonical works of philosophy in the West would be excluded.

> Note that, if applied consistently, it yields startling consequences, for then we should have to exclude from philosophy the works of Thomas Hobbes, Saint-Simon, Jeremy Bentham, John Stuart Mill, Karl Marx, Jean-Paul Sartre, John Rawls and many others! These works, after all, contain philosophical ideas that are clearly subordinated to their authors' social, political, and literary interests—and so would not qualify as philosophy according to [Frondizi's criterion]. On the other hand, Latin American thinkers...who

> gave hardly any thought to philosophical issues arising locally in the reality of their own societies but devoted themselves instead to alien problems and methods, making no significant contribution to them, would count as philosophers… Surely something has gone wrong here. (*LAT*, 533)

Nuccetelli adds that Frondizi's criterion would exclude not only these canonical works of philosophy, but also "most of what is done today in the flourishing areas of applied philosophy" (*LAT*, 533-534).

With this in mind, Nuccetelli concludes that the distinction between "Latin American thought" and "Latin American philosophy" is artificial and ought to be rejected.

> The distinction between philosophical thought and strict philosophy, therefore, seems to be an unhelpful contrivance that is better rejected. It doesn't really matter whether Sor Juana's proclamation of women's right to knowledge, Acosta's rebellion against Aristotelian science, Mariátegui's 'indigenous question,' and so on are classified as either philosophy or philosophical thought, since it is difficult to see how anything of importance could hinge on that distinction. In fact, many of the major figures I have mentioned here are not by any stretch of the imagination philosophers as they are conceived of today. But it is clear that these figures had ideas that are philosophically interesting and were often quite astute in their insights related to these ideas even where they did not argue rigorously, as philosophers are expected to do now. (*LAT*, 534)

Ultimately, Nuccetelli finds that if we expand our conception of philosophy, then it is even more obvious that Latin American Philosophy is an original and authentic tradition of philosophy that can stand proudly alongside other philosophical traditions.

Decolonial critique and U.S. academic philosophy

In section one of this chapter, we examined the writings of several Latin American scholars who raised the question of whether Latin American philosophy exists. This same question continues to be raised in U.S. today, but in the U.S. context, the meaning of the question is typically quite different.[16] When Mariátegui and Salazar Bondy raised the question, they were concerned with whether philosophical thought in Latin American reflected the people of Latin America in an original and authentic way. They were identifying the lack of a distinctive philosophy as one of

the devastating impacts of colonialism and neocolonialism in Latin America, and their skepticism about Latin American philosophy was motivated by a desire to encourage the development of Latin American philosophy and the flourishing of Latin America as a whole.

In the U.S., however, the question of whether there is such a thing as Latin American philosophy often arises from obliviousness about the philosophical work that has been produced in Latin America and incredulity that it could exist. A philosopher raising this question in the U.S. might wonder: If Latin American philosophy existed, would I not have learned about it as an undergraduate student? Would Latin American philosophy not be included in textbooks on the history of philosophy? Would there not be at least one specialist in Latin American philosophy in most philosophy departments? If Latin American philosophy existed, would it not be a part of the philosophical canon in the United States? In other words, when U.S. philosophers ask whether there is Latin American philosophy, the question often has to do with determining whether any Latin American philosophy actually lives up to U.S. standards.

Skepticism about the existence of Latin American philosophy in the U.S. thus takes the form of preemptive dismissiveness of its importance. In response to this dismissiveness, several defenders of Latin American philosophy have answered the skeptical question about its existence by turning the question on its head. Rather than asking whether Latin American philosophy exists, these philosophers ask: Given the amount of original and broadly interesting and impactful philosophical work that has been produced in Latin America, why has it received so little attention and respect in the English-speaking world? What are the conditions in the U.S. that have led academic philosophers to ignore this valuable work?

Rich discussions have developed in response to questions like these. Scholars have proposed a variety of explanations for why Latin American philosophy has been marginalized within the discipline and have analyzed the various ways in which this marginalization takes place.[17] Many of these discussions intersect with the work of feminists and non-Latinx scholars of color who have written extensively on the ways that the discipline of philosophy in the U.S. has tended to exclude certain histories, philosophical projects, and methods, as well as the participation of people of color.

With respect to the marginalization of Latin American philosophy in particular, one thread that runs through many of these discussions is the recognition of a link between the current marginalization of Latin American philosophy in U.S. academia and the long history of Western imperialism and colonization.[18] A central aspect of the legacy of colonialism is the dominant group's assertion of the superiority of their own ways of knowing and a disparagement of the intellectual achievements of colonized peoples. This tendency can take the form of Eurocentric prejudice, or the belief that the highest forms of knowledge (and even reason itself!) are a product of Western Europe.

Eurocentric prejudice can be found in the version of the history of philosophy that is taught to many students in the U.S. These students learn that philosophy began in Ancient Greece and reached is culmination in France, Germany, and England, and then in the United States. Meanwhile, African, Native American and indigenous, and Spanish-language philosophical traditions are effectively erased from the story of philosophy, such that many would be surprised to learn that they even exist.[19]

Beyond this historical erasure, the very ways in which philosophy has come to be defined since the mid-20th Century has had the effect—intended or not—of shutting many people out of the discipline. Mainstream U.S. philosophers often define philosophy in ways that correspond precisely to the ways in which *they*, Anglo-American philosophers, practice it. They then evaluate Latin American philosophy as deficient when it fails to adhere to the standards entailed in their definition. This creates a double bind for Latin American philosophy. On the one hand, if it is too original—distinct in subject matter or style, for instance—then it risks not being seen as real philosophy. On the other hand, if it successfully complies with the conceptual and methodological norms of Anglo-American philosophy, this leads some to a double down on the criticism that Latin American philosophy is merely imitative.[20] As we will see in the final section, one project of Latinx philosophy has been to generate ways out of this double bind by attending to both the distinctiveness and philosophical richness of Latin American and Latinx philosophy.

Latinx Philosophy

Metaphilosophical questions similar to those we have considered throughout this chapter have emerged in the past several decade surrounding the topic of Latinx philosophy. For example: *What are the defining characteristics of "Latinx philosophy"? Is Latinx philosophy a distinctive tradition of philosophy, and if so, what, if anything, makes it distinctively valuable when compared to other philosophical traditions?*

The emergence of these metaphilosophical questions about Latinx philosophy may reflect some ongoing changes within the discipline of philosophy. While philosophers of Latin American descent have historically faced exclusion and marginalization within the profession, there now appears to be an increasing number of Latinx professional philosophers, many of whom are working on issues related to Latinx and Latin American philosophy. These Latinx philosophers are also becoming more organized, as evidenced by the emergence of conferences, journals, and an American Philosophical Association newsletter dedicated to Latin American and Latinx philosophy. Likewise, there is an increasing number of Latinx students in many colleges and universities, and these students are often eager to learn about Latin American and Latinx philosophy, creating a demand for the creation of a "Latinx philosophy canon" that can be included in syllabi and textbooks (like this one!). At the same time, within the profession as a whole, the concern for inclusiveness has become more prominent, and there is a growing interest among many philosophers to explore alternatives to what has been the traditional, Eurocentric approach to philosophical questions.

In this context, one of the central concerns motivating the desire of some scholars to define "Latinx philosophy" is to highlight the distinctive value of Latinx philosophy, and thereby make it easier for a group that has been historically marginalized to gain recognition and status within the academy. At the same time, these scholars face the challenge of highlighting the value of their contributions to the discipline without inadvertently defining philosophy in a way that results in the problematic exclusion of other marginalized modes of thought, such as indigenous, Afro-Latino, or feminist perspectives. With this in mind, the question that many Latinx philosophers are grappling with today is: How can we define "Latinx philosophy" in a way that highlights its distinctive value—but *without* thereby reproducing the harms of exclusion?

Consider, for example, the following two ways that the term "Latinx philosophy" might be defined.

- *The Ethnic Definition*—"Latinx philosophy" includes any work of philosophy produced by Latinx people.
- *The Substantive Definition*—"Latinx philosophy" includes any work of philosophy that engages with the distinctive concerns of the Latinx community, and/or expresses the distinctive life-experiences, perspectives, and styles of the Latinx community.

Each of these approaches to the definition of "Latinx philosophy" has advantages and disadvantages. For example, the Ethnic Definition has the advantage of not excluding any Latinx philosophers, regardless of what kind of philosophy they work on. On the other hand, one possible disadvantage of this definition is that it would exclude the work of philosophers who are not Latinx, even if their work engages directly with the distinctive concerns of the Latinx community. More generally, this definition suggests that there is nothing philosophically substantive that unifies the work included under the label "Latinx philosophy"—or, indeed, that this term does not function as a description of a distinctive *tradition* of philosophy but, rather, functions as a *merely demographic* category.

Conversely, one advantage of the Substantive Definition is that it would make it easier for proponents to show that Latinx philosophy is a distinctive tradition of thought, and one that offers valuable perspectives on issues that are important to the Latinx community. However, this definition would exclude many works by Latinx philosophers, based on the focus of their work. For example, the work of the prominent Latino epistemologist Ernest Sosa would not be included as part of the tradition of Latinx philosophy under this definition, because Sosa's work does not engage substantively with the distinctive concerns of the Latinx community or express this community's distinctive life-experiences, perspectives, or styles of thought and expression. Another possible disadvantage of the Substantive Definition of "Latinx philosophy" is that it seems to require proponents to specify the Latinx community's distinctive concerns, life-experiences, perspectives, and styles of expression, in order to determine whether a philosopher's work engages with them. Doing so is quite difficult, however, because the "Latinx community" is extremely diverse. It includes people born all over Latin America, as well as

people born in the U.S. who have never been to Latin America and do not speak Spanish; it also includes people from every social class, political and religious persuasion, sexual orientation, and every other dimension of human diversity. With this diversity in mind, we may doubt that it is possible to identify anything close to a single "Latinx perspective" on *any* philosophical question.

The authors of this chapter, Francisco Gallegos and Lori Gallegos de Castillo, have addressed this issue with regard to one segment of the Latinx community. In their article, "On the Distinctive Value of Mexican-American Philosophy" (forthcoming), we argue that although the Mexican-American community is extremely diverse, it is possible to identify a common set of concerns shared by this group, including concerns about *immigration, identity, heritage and tradition, language,* and *recognition*, as well as a common set of intuitions shared by this community as a whole, including the intuitions that *colonial histories shape the present;* that *the plight of the immigrant should elicit empathy;* and that *the Mexican-American experience is complex and manifold*. One of our central hesitations with this approach, however, is that it risks misinterpreting or excluding the views of particular people who identify as Mexican-American. The Mexican-American community is extremely diverse, and it feels dangerous or even dogmatic to assert which concerns and intuitions are reflective of the Mexican-American community as a whole. This risk is only amplified when we consider the Latinx community, which is much larger and more diverse than the Mexican-American community.

Without the pretense of resolving this issue, then, we conclude here by briefly outlining a handful of the metaphilosophical themes that have been developed by thinkers who identify as Latinx and who have shared their work in self-identifying Latinx philosophical venues in recent years. These themes include:

- Demonstrating to other U.S. philosophers the value of Latin American and Latinx philosophy in its own right and in terms of questions of major interest in Anglo-American and European philosophy;
- Working with Latin American philosophers to think transnationally about philosophical issues of mutual concern;

- Theorizing the nature of the philosophical canon, and pressing for a reconfiguration of the canon to include Latin American and Latinx philosophy;
- Investigating the relationship between disciplinary boundaries and the demographics of practitioners;
- Examining the way in which the discipline of philosophy and academic institutional practices perpetuate colonial oppression, and imagining alternative ways of engaging in scholarly activity that avoid perpetuating coloniality and are responsive to colonial harms;
- Exploring the way in which coloniality has produced the erasure of knowledges emerging out of non-Western frameworks and by non-white thinkers in Latin America; and
- Moving beyond the discipline of philosophy in order to engage with philosophical thought that is not constrained by those disciplinary boundaries.

Given the critical way in which Latinx philosophers have oriented themselves with respect to the discipline of philosophy, it is perhaps unsurprising that Latinx philosophy, Latina feminism, and decolonial philosophy have emerged as frameworks through which some of the richest and most innovative metaphilosophical work is being carried out. Thus, although we leave the question of how to define "Latinx philosophy" unanswered, we can identify a central set of questions to attend to as this conversation continues: Will the concern with liberation from the persistent and oppressive legacies of colonization emerge as the defining characteristic of Latinx philosophy? And will this concern lend to Latinx philosophy an original, authentic, and distinctively valuable perspective on classical philosophical questions, while simultaneously pushing the boundaries of what counts as philosophy?

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[1] An important question to ask here is: What were the historical, social, and political conditions that led to this conversation arising in the 20th century? Although many Latin American countries had achieved political independence a century earlier, it seemed that strong national and cultural identities had been slower to coalesce. By the time that Mariátegui was writing, however, a number of scholars were becoming optimistic about the development and trajectory of intellectual life in Latin America. Mariátegui notes that his reflections on Latin American thought developed in response to a growing interest across Latin America in creating an organization of intellectuals across Latin America (See Mariátegui, "Is There Such a Thing as Hispanic-American Thought?", pp.116-17).

[2] Mariátegui, "Is There Such a Thing as Hispanic-American Thought?" 118.

[3] Salazar Bondy, "The Meaning and Problem of Hispanic American Thought," 387-8. Cited in text using the abbreviation *MP* and page number.

[4] Mariátegui uses the phrase "new soul" when he quotes the Argentine politician Alfredo Palacios, who claimed that "the intermingling of races has given us a new soul." The phrase refers to the idea that, following the widespread ethnic and racial mixtures that occurred during the period of colonization and the subsequent national independence movements throughout the Americas, distinctive peoples, with their own cultures and destinies, had been created. See Mariátegui, "Is There Such a Thing as Hispanic-American Thought?", 118.

[5] Mariátegui, "Is There Such a Thing as Hispanic-American Thought?", 118-19.

[6] Frondizi, "Is There an Ibero-American Philosophy?", 350-351.

[7] Frondizi, "Is There an Ibero-American Philosophy?", 346.

[8] Medina, "The Possibility of an Indigenous Philosophy," 374.

[9] Medina, "The Possibility of an Indigenous Philosophy," 374.

[10] Medina, "The Possibility of an Indigenous Philosophy," 373.

[11] Gracia, *Latinos in America,* 140.

[12] Gracia, *"Hispanics/Latinos and Philosophy: A Response,"* 238.

[13] Schutte, "Toward an Understanding of Latin American Philosophy," 24. Cited in text using the abbreviation *LAP* and page number.

[14] Zea, "The Actual Function of Philosophy in Latin America," 364. Cited in text using the abbreviation *FPLA* and page number.

[15] Nuccetelli, "Is 'Latin American Thought' Philosophy?", 529-530. Cited in text using the abbreviation *LAT* and page number.
[16] Elena Ruíz examines the shift in the Question of Authenticity across cultural contexts in greater depth in the essay "Latin American Philosophy at a Crossroads."
[17] A collection of some of these writings can be found in the volume *Reframing the Practice of Philosophy: Bodies of Color, Bodies of Knowledge*, ed. George Yancy, Albany: SUNY Press, 2012.
[18] Much of the important theoretical work in describing the ongoing, multifaceted legacy of colonialism beginning with the colonization of the Americas has been developed by a multi-generational and growing group of scholars who are frequently associated with the collective Latin American Modernity/Coloniality/Decoloniality Research Program (MCD). Some key texts from this group of scholars include: Quijano, "Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality"; Quijano, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America"; Dussel, "World-System and 'Trans'-Modernity"; Dussel, *The Invention of the Americas: Eclipse of 'the Other' and the Myth of Modernity*; Escobar, "Worlds and Knowledges Otherwise"; Lugones, "Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System"; Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs*; Coronil, "Beyond Occidentalism: Toward Nonimperial Geohistorical Categories"; and Maldonado-Torres, "On the Coloniality of Being."
[19] See Millán, "Language, Power, and Philosophy." Millán argues that philosophy's "mendacious cultural autobiography," which locates philosophy in this particular set of nations, also bestow on the French, German and English languages a special status as "philosophical languages."
[20] Mignolo describes this double bind in his article "The Geopolitics of Knowledge and the Colonial Difference."