

THE DANGERS OF RE-COLONIZATION: BOUNDARIES BETWEEN LATIN AMERICAN PHILOSOPHY AND INDIGENOUS PHILOSOPHY FROM LATIN AMERICA

JORGE SANCHEZ-PEREZ

ABSTRACT: *The field of Latin American philosophy has established itself as a relevant subfield of philosophical inquiry. However, there might be good reasons to consider that our focus on the subfield could have distracted us from considering another subfield that, although it might share some geographical proximity, does not share the same historical basic elements. In this paper, I argue for a possible and meaningful conceptual difference between Latin American Philosophy and Indigenous philosophy produced in Latin America. First, I raise what I call Mariátegui's Solidarity Challenge to show that there might be some neglectful treatment of the philosophical views of different Indigenous groups. I then depart from Mariátegui and engage in a critical exercise to show that even he would be guilty of failing in his own solidarity demands. I follow that by drawing out some implications of the argument. I first sketch how this differentiation would play out against the political project of "Mestizaje," a project that seems to inform some of the Latin American philosophical tradition. I then speculate about the kinds of duties that the field of Latin American philosophy might have towards the field of Indigenous Philosophy produced in Latin America.*

Keywords: *Andean philosophy, colonization, comparative philosophy, Indigenous philosophy, Latin American philosophy*

1. INTRODUCTION

Almost one hundred years ago, Peruvian thinker José Carlos Mariátegui asked readers to consider whether there was some characteristic Hispano-American or Latin-American thought. He considered that the conceptual dependency on Europe was still too important for us to think that those people conducting intellectual labour in the Americas were conducting an independent or uniquely different project (Mariátegui, *Existe un Pensamiento Hispanoamericano* 1979, 7). Similarly, almost fifty years ago, another Peruvian thinker Augusto Salazar Bondy shared some of Mariátegui's concerns

SANCHEZ PEREZ, JORGE: Assistant Professor of Philosophy, University of Alberta, Canada.
Email: jsanchezperez@ualberta.ca

and noticed that Latin American Philosophy was a kind of thought originally imposed by European conquerors fitting the interests of the Spanish crown and church (1988, 109). Such a situation, he claimed, was still lingering in the field. Therefore, he concluded, Latin American Philosophy has not been a genuine and original thought but inauthentic and imitative at the fundamental level (Salazar Bondy 1988, 117). Things, however, change.

In that vein of change, twenty years ago, Susana Nuccetelli replied to Mariátegui and Augusto Salazar Bondy in her paper “*Is ‘Latin American Thought’ Philosophy?*” In that paper, she showed how Salazar Bondy had overstated his case against the existence of something characteristically Latin American (Nuccetelli 2003, 526). For “although many Latin American thinkers did at times accept Western paradigms, it is not the case that all of them did or that they always did so, as may be seen from the works of the Mexican nun Sor Juana Inéz de la Cruz and the Jesuit Missionary José de Acosta” both of whom rebelled against the dominant Iberian Scholastic paradigm of their time (Nuccetelli 2003, 526).

Thanks to the work of authors such as Enrique Dussell, Carlos Santiago Nino, Newton da Acosta, and Susana Nuccetelli herself, we are now at a time when few would question whether Latin American Philosophy *is actually philosophy*. Raising that question would show bias and deny what might be considered a tangible reality. Latin American Philosophy is part of the field of philosophy. Yet, after establishing itself as a subfield of philosophy and gaining a recognition that few would object as a fact, I want to show some of Mariátegui’s concerns about Indigenous views and the field of Latin American Philosophy that might still hold some relevance.

In this paper, I will argue that there is a possible and meaningful conceptual difference between Latin American Philosophy and Indigenous philosophy produced in Latin America. The latter usually being considered to be a subfield of the former. To accomplish my goal, I will first and briefly survey the idea of Latin American Philosophy and how it presents issues of Indigeneity in some sources. Next, I will point out the relationship between Latin American Philosophy and the Western world, even if negative at times but nonetheless a relationship. I will then move on to re-cast what I call Mariátegui’s Solidarity Challenge and establish how the challenge still has merits. In that section, I will also show how, and against some views held by Mariátegui himself, when we consider the roots of certain traditions of thought -such as the Andean tradition- we can identify a radically different point of departure from what is commonly considered a characteristic element of Latin American Philosophy. Finally, I conclude this paper with two important implications for my view. First, I sketch how the differentiation between Latin American Philosophy and Indigenous philosophy produced in Latin America would play out against the political project of “Mestizaje,” a project that seems to inform some of the Latin American political and philosophical tradition. Then, I argue that the field of Latin American Philosophy might have some duties towards the field of Indigenous philosophy produced in Latin America.

2. THE (RELATIONAL) IDEA OF LATIN AMERICAN PHILOSOPHY AND THE INDIGENOUS QUESTION

In this section, I have no intention of arguing for or against Latin American Philosophy's existence. Even if the debates continue to rage on Latin American Philosophy's identity (Rivera Berruz 2019), the field cannot be denied its existence. That, I consider, should be considered a settled issue. Instead, my goal in this section is to highlight the issue of *relationality* between Latin American Philosophy and Western philosophy. First, I briefly consider how Latin American Philosophy is characterized in some definitions and then how the relationship with Indigenous philosophical views from Latin America is portrayed.

A good starting point for analyzing the idea of Latin American Philosophy is to look at some definitions provided by practitioners in the field. For Gracia and Vargas, in "its most expansive sense, Latin American Philosophy is philosophy produced in Latin America or philosophy produced by persons of Latin American ancestry who reside outside of Latin America" (Gracia & Vargas 2022). However, even if the previous definition is broad, the idea of Latin American Philosophy grows larger when looking at the temporal framework. For, in their view, Latin American Philosophy started with pre-Columbian thought. They support this claim by noticing that there seems to be good evidence that "in at least the major pre-Columbian civilizations there were attempts to explore questions about the nature of reality, the limits of knowledge, and the basis of right action" (Gracia & Vargas 2022).

A second view that seems relevant to this section is the one produced by Susana Nuccetelli. For Nuccetelli, "[i]dentifiable as a part of mainstream Western philosophy, Latin American Philosophy is a relative newcomer, a discipline still defining itself and the subject of lively debates over basics" (2020, xi). While a third and final view worthy of consideration is the one developed by Ofelia Schutte, for whom an analysis of different strains of thought surrounding Latin American Philosophy would clearly show a unified theory of value. For her, a defining feature of those projects is that they all address "the question of the historical and cultural interrelationship of Latin America to the rest of the world, the issue of the dependence and independence of Latin America vis-a-vis the rest of the world" (Schutte 1987).

In all the previous cases, ideas around Latin American Philosophy seem to consider the Western perspective as the main point of reference. I must clarify that this claim should not be read as a challenge of authenticity or an attack due to claims of something being derivative (Mariategu 1979) (Salazar Bondy 1988). My goal is simply to point to the fact that the perspective of analysis starts with the Western canon, even if to reject it or develop further away from it.

Following that frame of reference, it is interesting to notice how some anthologies of Latin American Philosophy tend to consider issues about Indigenous people mostly from the Conquest of America's perspective or at least a perspective that takes that point as a central feature for the analysis. For example, in the book *A Companion to Latin American Philosophy*, published in 2009, James Maffie does an excellent job introducing readers to what is called pre-Columbian. First, he mentions how the

indigenous peoples of what is now called “Latin America” “enjoy long and rich traditions of philosophical inquiry dating back centuries before being characterized by their European “discoverers” as “primitives” incapable of or unmotivated to think philosophically.” After that, he proceeds to discuss the views of “Andean and Aztec societies, the two most prominent indigenous philosophies flourishing during the period of contact (i.e., of mutual encounter, interaction, exchange, and conflict between Europeans and indigenous peoples) in the sixteenth century” (Maffie 2009, 9).

At the same time, the anthology *Latin American and Latinx Philosophy: A Collaborative Introduction* from 2019 has a chapter entitled “The Indian Problem Conquest and the Valladolid Debate,” where Alejandro Santa discusses “a complex set of related questions that Europeans, mostly Spaniards, raised about their treatment of the indigenous peoples of the Americas” (2019, 36). While in the same book, another chapter entitled “Indigenism in Peru and Bolivia,” written by Kim Diaz “explores Indigenism in Peru and Bolivia by focusing on the thought of Manuel González Prada, José Carlos Mariátegui, and Fausto Reinaga” where the author broadly understands Indigenism as “the study of and advocacy for Native or Aboriginal peoples primarily by Westerners” (Díaz 2019).

My previous account should not be considered an attack on the field of Latin American Philosophy, far from it. Instead, my goal in this section is to highlight what I consider a relevant element within the tradition. Its relationship with the Western philosophical canon and Western-guided historical events. What follows is my attempt to re-cast what I consider a relevant challenge from Jose Carlos Mariátegui. This challenge consists in analyzing whether Latin American Philosophy has engaged with Indigenous thought from the Americas in a meaningful way and what kind of conclusions one could get if that process were to be conducted.

3. MARIÁTEGUI’S SOLIDARITY CHALLENGE

For Jose Carlos Mariátegui, the Western landslides¹ that gave birth to or informed a great deal of Latin American culture have prevented it from mixing or solidarizing with the “land over which the colonization of America has deposited them” (1979, 8). For in many parts of the Americas, those landslides are still shallow and independent, which prevented the proper blossoming of the Indigenous soul, depressed and sullen due to the brutality of the Conquest, “which in some Hispanic-American people has not changed its methods to this day” (1979, 8). As Mariátegui pointed out, perhaps in countries like Argentina, one could claim that the mixing of races was the reality. Still, that reality would hardly apply to countries like Peru or Bolivia. For him, Indigenous peoples were separated from the process that could be said to be related to the formation of Latin American thought. In this section, I want to consider this position seriously.

My goal here is to acknowledge the possible existence of systems of thought that, although currently seen as part of Latin American Philosophy, seem to be independent of the historical process that led to the construction of what we know as Latin America.

¹ Perhaps the analogy of bulldozing could help English speaking readers make sense of this metaphor.

To do that, I will first focus on the “Indigenous Problem” and the Possibility of Andean Indigenous Philosophy.

My argument begins with the acknowledgement of the contemporary relevance of one of Mariátegui’s most well-known books, his *Seven Interpretative Essays on Peruvian Reality* from 1928. There, he aimed to provide readers with a social diagnostic and possible methodological approaches to pressing social issues affecting the lives of millions of Peruvians. One of the transversal topics of the essays was the treatment and status of Indigenous people in Peru. In the second essay, entitled “The Indigenous Problem,” Mariátegui clarifies the problem with Indigenous people in Peru and probably other parts of the Americas. For him, a socialist critical approach discovers and clarifies that the “Indigenous problem” is not a problem of the administration of the state, the legal system, religious views, racial differences, or even moral or cultural conditions. Instead, the Indigenous issue starts with the economy (2016, 27) and to miss this point would be to miss the core issue that affects a large part of the continent’s population.

Mariátegui furthers his claim by stating that considering the Indigenous problem as one of *ethnic* origin would also be problematic since it would imply the acceptance of some of the dustiest imperialistic ideals out there. Here, two elements are of relevance, the idea of ethnicity and its connection to the Western world. For him, rightly so, Western societies used the ideas of race and ethnicity to expand and conquer under a system that would place their white race and ethnicity above all others in the world (Mariátegui 2016, 30). In the following paragraphs, I want to focus on this crucial point relying on the analysis of Anibal Quijano.

In his essay “‘Raza’, ‘Etnia’, y ‘Nacion’ en Mariátegui” Quijano notices how the establishment of the colonial capitalist world that emerged after 1492 gave way to “a power structure with crucial elements that where, especially in its combination, a historical novelty.” On the one hand, the articulation of “diverse relationships of exploitation and labour”, on the other the “production of new historical identities, ‘indian’, ‘black’, ‘white’ and ‘mestizo’, imposed after as the basic categories of the relationships of domination and as foundations of a culture of racism and etnicism.” (Quijano 2014, 757).²

For Quijano, the best explanation for the creation of those new historical identities resides in the creation of the mental category of “race.” This is shown in the very attempt of Europeans of attributing to those defeated during the Conquista the feature of not being human at all. Although the Catholic church settled the issue by establishing that Indigenous people from the Americas were human, the idea that there was a biological difference between Europeans and those who were conquest remained. This led to some to identified such a difference as inferiority and from there “the idea that cultural differences are linked to such biological differences and that are not, therefore, the product of the history of the relationships among people and the rest of the universe” (Quijano 2014, 759) flourished.

² I will conduct my own translation of the work of Quijano and other sources in Spanish along this paper.

As the analysis of Quijano shows, since the conquest of the Americas, the idea that certain practices from particular groups, or from certain *ethnicities*, belonged or were the product of biologically inferior people became a staple of the relationships of power in the continent. Following that, Mariátegui seems more than justified in considering that an analysis of the Indigenous question that relies on ethnic, as in cultural, perspectives is destined to end up forcing us to accept what he calls the dustiest imperialistic ideals out there.

Even though Quijano's conceptual analysis of the use of ethnic claims and its racist roots seems like a good enough entry point to understand Mariátegui's concerns with that angle of argumentation, it is not the only possible one to mention. The social context of the early 20th century Peru, in which Mariátegui's ideas were developed, seem to provide evidence that his concerns about ethnical analysis were justified. His context was one of prevalent *Social Darwinism*, where Indigenous people from the Americas, along with Asians and Africans, were seen as naturally inferior to white Europeans.

By *Social Darwinism* I understand the pseudoscientific views of Herbert Spencer that guided, in one way or another, the views of Western white elites during the 19th and 20th century. Spencer claimed that the "survival of the fittest" understood in social and cultural ways, was but a manifestation of biological inclinations. In that sense, he considered that his social analysis was in line with "that which Mr. Darwin has called 'natural selection, or the preservation of favoured races in the struggle for life.'" (Spencer, *The Principles of Biology* 1864, 444-5). From his basic biological analysis, Spencer goes on to conclude that what drives "dominant races to overrun the inferior races" is fact that their brain matter is larger (1876, 8). In other words, under the paradigm of Social Darwinism, biological features tend to cause a superior intellect. Therefore, a state of affairs where Europeans had conquered most of the world comes to show that their biological and cultural positions were necessarily superior to those of the conquered people.

A good example and perhaps more directly establishing the points of Spencer can be seen in some views held by the famous *Social Darwinist* Friedrich Von Bernhardt. For him, the usefulness of war resided in its capacity to determine who was superior. In his view, the strong life would gain the upper hand while "[t]he weaker succumbs" (1914, 18). In a context in which Indigenous peoples of the Americas had been conquered via the use of force or other forms, the idea that this showed not only their racial but also ethnical or cultural inferiority to Europeans was openly embraced in many circles of the Peruvian society.

By the late 19th century and early 20th century, the view that the white race and the ethnicities connected to it were superior to anything related to Indigenous people, *Social Darwinism*, was predominant among large sectors of the political leadership of Peru. For these actors, many of the country's problems could be explained by the existence of Indigenous people in lands that could be better used to host European immigrants. As Pilar García Jordán properly states, the Western thesis about "the degeneration of the races, the existence of superior races and their 'inevitable' victory over the inferior ones" helped legitimize the ideas the dominant Peruvian culture held.

The main idea is that “whites” and even mestizos should rule over the Indigenous population (1992, 968-9).

Against that conceptual and practical background, it seems understandable that a methodology such as a Marxist one, which seems more inclined to reject the idea of hierarchies among races and ethnicities, would be a more appealing option for Mariátegui. An approach that not only avoided the commonly racist and hierarchical practices of Western views about ethnicity and therefore culture, but that, according to him, was developed by Marx as a method of historical interpretation of modern society (Mariátegui 2011, 194). Which, of course, allowed for the question of the place of Indigenous people in such a society to be raised in the first place.

For Mariátegui and other Marxists, the methodology seemed useful and neutral because “[h]istorical materialism is precisely not metaphysical or philosophical materialism, nor is it a philosophy of history left behind by scientific progress” for them, “Marx had no reason to create anything more than a method of historical interpretation of modern society” (Mariátegui 2011, 194). Notice here how the word metaphysics is used in a negative sense by Mariátegui.

Another example of this approach can be seen in the following quote from the essay “Aniversario y Balance” from the Journal *Amauta*. There, Mariátegui claims that:

We leave the spirits incapable of accepting and understanding their epoch to their sterile afflictions and tearful metaphysics. Socialist materialism encompasses all the possibilities of spiritual, ethical and philosophical ascension. And never have we felt more rabid, more efficacious and more religiously idealist than when we solidly place our ideas and our feet on that which is material. (Mariátegui 2011, 130)

The denial of metaphysical elements in the chosen methodology is not unique to Mariátegui or Marxists. In my experience, it is more common than not to hear some Latin American Marxists, from the many political parties they constantly create, use metaphysics as something that “the others” have, not them. In that context, their underlying worldviews or implicit metaphysical assumptions are considered neutral and objective claims of reality. This practice, of course, is not unique to Marxists³.

The case of John Rawls might help us illuminate the case of Marxists such as Mariátegui. In Rawls’ view, his own account of justice was not grounded on any metaphysical account. Yet, in a footnote in his famous 1985 paper *Justice as Fairness: Political not Metaphysical*, Rawls acknowledged that his metaphysical assumptions were so common among the European authors he embraced as his predecessors, that acknowledging such assumptions as metaphysical ones might have looked like a vain

³ Of course, it would be unfair to claim that there are no grounds in the works of Marx for this rejection or suspicion of metaphysics. In Chapter Two of *The Poverty of Philosophy*, Marx states “Thus the metaphysicians who, in making these abstractions, think they are making analyses, and who, the more they detach themselves from things, imagine themselves to be getting all the nearer to the point of penetrating to their core – these metaphysicians in turn are right in saying that things here below are embroideries of which the logical categories constitute the canvas. This is what distinguishes the philosopher from the Christian. The Christian, in spite of logic, has only one incarnation of the Logos; the philosopher has never finished with incarnations.” (Marx 1936, 89-90)

effort (Rawls 1985, 240). My point here is that by assuming a neutral metaphysical point of departure -or no metaphysical point of departure at all- we might be ignoring a relevant part of our analysis, and our methodology might be less explicit regarding a foundational cultural piece of what might make it relevant.

At this stage, I can conclude that, in the case of Mariátegui, ethnic or cultural questions seemed irrelevant to address the Indigenous problem for two reasons. The first is the conceptual and practical entanglement that ethnic analysis had with Western approaches where Indigenous cultures were deemed as inherently inferior to Europeans due to the Conquista and, therefore, subject to be dominated. The second is his commitment to a particular methodological process that denies some fundamental metaphysical premises that it might have.

Regarding the second point, avid readers might rightfully claim that I have not proven that there are some metaphysical commitments in a Marxist or socialist methodology like the one embraced by Mariátegui. At best, I have pointed out the rejection of metaphysical considerations. To those readers, I would request a little bit of patience. The reason for that request is that precisely the existence of a diversity of metaphysical worldviews, due to cultural differences, could mean that when talking about Latin American Philosophy we might be talking about something that diverges from Indigenous philosophy produced in Latin America. From here onwards, although I am still engaging with Mariátegui's Solidarity Challenge, I will depart from him with regards of the validity of an ethnic or cultural analysis.

Let us consider the issue of Marxist determinism that informs some of Mariátegui's readings of society. For Mariátegui, Marxist determinism should not be read as disregarding "faith, will, heroic and creative conviction, whose impulse it would be absurd to seek in a mediocre and passive determinist sentiment" (2011, 210). Yet even this nuanced kind of determinism that Mariátegui defends carries within itself certain metaphysical assumptions relevant to consider in opposition to those historically held by people from non-Western societies.

Although the short nature of this paper will limit further analysis, it might suffice to claim that any version of Marxist determinism might be seen as within a linear account of time where the economic conditions determine the kind of society we have. To what degree those conditions determine some things is not my goal here to ponder. Instead, I aim to show the reader that on this account of reality, a metaphysical explanation, might differ from an Indigenous Andean one.

Two examples might help make the difference clearer. The first one that I have in mind comes from Chapter 5 of the Huarochiri Manuscript. There, we can find a paragraph where the story of ancient deer is told. According to the narrator, in ancient times, deer used to eat human flesh. One day, after the deer had multiplied and were plenty, a dance was taking place. In that moment, they recited, "how would we do to eat humans?" while they were in the middle of that ritual, a small deer misspoke and claimed, "how would humans do to eat us?" After hearing those words, the deer disbanded and from that day onward humans eat deer.

The second one is the case of the Inkarrí. In this myth passed on via oral tradition, after the death of the last Inka, his remains were sent to the four parts of the

Tawantinsuyo⁴. The myth claims that the head resides in Cusco and its alive. Secretly, beyond the sight of the Europeans, the head is growing a body. Once the Inkari is complete again, he will rise again and will defeat the European invaders and restore the lost order in the world that came as a product of the Conquista.

Both examples show a conception of the world where social conditions are not deterministic in Andean society. That is, things such as economic conditions do not determine the kind of society we could have or that might come. A proper ritual or some movement from outside the physical rules of the world could in fact change the outcome of some historical pattern. For Carmela Zanelli, from a reading of *El Primer Nueva Coronica y Buen Gobierno* from Guaman Poma de Ayala and the *Manuscrito de Huarochiri*, it is possible to see Andean culture as one driven by utopic commitments. For her, Andean culture embraces not the recovery of a lost paradise but the projection of a future possibility (Zanelli 1992, 97).

Furthermore, this distinction about the possible nature of society is not the only one that should give us pause when considering the metaphysical views that Andean people to this day might hold. A key concept when approaching Andean culture is that of *Pacha*. As Estermann notices, it is possible to consider *Pacha* as the organized universe in spatial-temporal categories, but not only that. *Pacha* can also mean the union between that which is “visible and which is invisible, that which is material and which is immaterial, earthly and celestial, the profane and the sacred, the exterior and the interior” (Estermann 2006, 157). Yet, for all its complexities and variations, an approach to Andean culture seems to demand our embracing of this metaphysically relevant concept that relies on a relational account of existence.

Atuq Eusebio Manga Qespi is a Quechua scholar who has conducted profound and interesting analyses of some key concepts in the language. For him, when analyzing time in Quechua thought from historical sources and contemporary practices, it is possible to identify how *Pacha* operates in different grammatical scenarios. Such analyses might lead us to consider that for Andean thought, unlike Western thought, there isn't “a structural or contingent account of future time, but a consequential future or a future that is a product of human action” (175).⁵

I want to highlight here that acknowledging the important metaphysical views that underlie some Indigenous views from the Americas, in this case from the Andes, implies a whole set of theoretical and conceptual challenges for Western-based philosophical views. Based on that, I consider that perhaps the problem of Indigenous people that Mariátegui was discussing was at least partially, and meaningfully, ethnic.

⁴ Tawantinsuyo can be translated from Quechua to English as the realm of the four parts.

⁵ A concept similarly loaded in metaphysical implications that, when properly considered, presents tensions for Western-philosophical approaches is *kanyini*. A concept from the philosophical tradition of Aboriginal people of Australia. In her recent book “Subjects of Intergenerational Justice” Christine Winter introduces the concept within a framework of “relational holism” reminding readers that the concept speaks to a notion of community that “is an entangled set of human-nonhuman relationships that criss-cross the continent, time, the universe and the transcendent” (2022, 95). More needs to be said about how concepts like *Kanyini* and *Pacha* could relate to each other and how my argument could also have extension to Indigenous views usually subsumed to other dominant views in North America. However, due to the limited scope of this paper I will not engage in that debate here.

Ethnic in a sense that a whole set of fundamental views from a human group is at stake, and thus it opens the doors for debates about possible cultural tensions, if not incommensurability. These debates would merit the assessment of the compatibility of Marxist or socialist methodologies with Andean thought and the acknowledgement that something quite different from Latin American philosophical views might co-exist alongside it. This co-existence, in turn, could give us pause to consider whether this possible Indigenous philosophical paradigm is a branch of Latin American Philosophy or a whole different tree, which has been blossoming practically unattended for centuries in the same garden.

If my previous analysis has any merit, then Mariátegui's Solidarity Challenge can be framed in the following way, has Latin American Philosophy as a subfield encouraged the development of Indigenous ideas from Latin America or has it subsumed it as if it were another part of its own project? Of course, my analysis in this section might be deemed as be in tension with an interested debate between Nuccetelli (2010) and Gracia (2010), for whom a point of contention was whether one could incorporate something like the Popol Vuh within the canon of Latin American Philosophy. In my reading, incorporating sources such as the Popol Vuh or the Huarochirí Manuscript as parts of the canon would be an example of the invisibilization of thought traditions that deserve their own conceptual and academic space.

In the next and final section, I will first engage with the idea of the mestizo political project that informs much of Latin America. Next, I will provide examples of how this view creates tensions by not engaging Indigenous views. Then, I will focus on providing an answer to the following two questions *is there a possible conceptual differentiation between the philosophy developed by those who broke away from the European tradition and those who were not and never were part of it? And If there is such a possible differentiation, what obligations arise for those working in Latin American Philosophy regarding this other possible subfield of inquiry?*

4. THE DUBIOUS PROJECT OF MESTIZAJE (POLITICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL) AND THE DUTY OF SOLIDARITY

In this final section, I draw two implications about the conceptual difference between Latin American Philosophy and Indigenous philosophy produced in Latin America that I have defended in this paper. The first one is about the possible outcomes of pressing my distinction against a project such as "mestizaje," as one might find in the works of Jose Vasconcelos. Particularly relevant is his position as presented in the "La Raza Cómica" or "The Cosmic Race," a book originally published in 1925. The second one is about the possible duties that the field of Latin American philosophy might have towards the field of Indigenous Philosophy produced in Latin America.

Regarding the first implication, it is important to understand the "mestizaje" project's political nature to see how it would hold against my position. For Vasconcelos, in parts of the American continent, one can find "all the elements of a new humanity" that, under some natural law, will use "universality and beauty" to form itself (2012, 34). On this view, this "new humanity" is non-other than Latin Americans and as such,

the only ones that possess the spirit, race, and territory to promote the new era of humanity (2012, 34). What makes Latin Americans the new peak of humanity is that Latin America will be (is?) the place where all the races of the world mix. This mixing is meant to give birth to a new race “made with the treasures of all the previous races,” allowing humanity to progress to the “final race, the cosmic race” (2012, 35). As Nuccetelli notices, for Vasconcelos, “This fusion of all the different races of the world (...) will incorporate the distinctive strengths that are characteristic of each race, thus overcoming the limitations of mono-racial identity that are the Achilles heel of even the currently triumphant Anglo-Saxons” (2020, 165).

The philosophical idea that “mestizos” are a new race that is superior, or different, from the others seems to be an important part of different discourses throughout Latin America. This view is commonly upheld in contemporary discourses in different countries with some negative consequences. In Peru, for example, the phrase “el que no tiene de inga tiene de mandinga” that can be roughly translated as “everybody is part Indigenous or part Black” is a common idiom that “references the mix Indigenous, Black, Asian, and white bloods” (Martínez 2004, 38). A phrase constantly repeated by politicians and local elites to claim that there is no such thing as a person in the country that is not mixed, therefore allowing for the invisibilization of Indigenous views in the political arena.

By the first month of 2023, massive Quechua and Aymara-led protests in Peru had led to clashes with government armed forces leading to almost fifty deaths (Villegas & Machicao, 2023). The current violence in Peru is a good example that the constant repetition of the mantra of mestizaje has done little to engage with Indigenous views in the country. Another important recent case is the rejection of the new Chilean Constitution. In September of 2022, the draft of a new constitutional document was rejected in a referendum because, among other reasons, the emphasis on the autonomy of Indigenous people seemed to break the idea of a single mestizo race-based nation in a way that disgusted large segments of urban voters (Dorfman 2022).

Although more examples could be provided about the problems that the reduction of Latin America to a “mestizo society” creates, the previous ones show something important. Not every group in Latin America has rejected their Indigenous roots. Nor are they necessarily willing to do so, as it might be implicitly needed in Vasconcelos’ project. Nevertheless, there seems to be something extremely problematic with a view of Latin America grounded on the premise that everything in the territory belongs to a mestizo project. As the current state of affairs of countries with large Indigenous populations in South America shows, Indigenous people are not necessarily part of the mestizo project. Despite what some political and national narratives might claim. To approach Latin American societies armed with this premise is to create the conditions for the invisibilization of the views of those original inhabitants of the continent.

This premise is not only conceptually problematic but non-viable as a point of departure for constructing a society. But it is also so from the perspective of philosophy. As the distinction I have been making in this paper shows, we have good reasons to differentiate between Latin American philosophy and the Indigenous philosophy created in the geographical space. If we refuse to make this distinction, we are

promoting the same invisibilization of views that continues to create existential problems for people in Latin America.

Regarding the second implication, I want to go back to the arguments established in this paper and return to the views of Jose Carlos Mariátegui. In his challenge to the existence of what we might now call Latin American Philosophy almost a hundred years ago, Mariátegui raised the concern that much of the thought produced in the Americas was still blocking the development or emergence of the Indigenous soul. Suppose with me that one takes a closer look at such a soul. In that case, one might find complex systems of thought that could provide us with sources and elements to conceptualize or reconstruct intricate philosophical systems. This effort would not be much different from what James Maffie did in his 2015 book *Aztec Philosophy: Understanding a World in Motion* (Maffie, *Aztec Philosophy: Understanding a World in Motion* 2014). In that work, an entire system of thought that pre-dated the creation of what we might call Latin America was presented coherently and systematically. This effort allowed him to later claim in his 2019 essay *Philosophy Without Europe* that we are at a point where it would be hard to deny that “Mexican philosophers pursued— as their present-day descendants continue to pursue—philosophy without Europe.”

Given the existence of these systems⁶ and their complexities in a way that seems to be independent of the historical process that led to the construction of what we know as Latin America, it seems possible to claim two things. The first one is that a conceptual differentiation between Latin American Philosophy and Indigenous philosophy produced in the geographical area of Latin America might be possible, if not necessary. Following considerations in that regard, worldviews that clearly pre-date Latin America’s very existence as Latin American views would be considered odd. The second one is that this differentiation should raise important questions about what kinds of duties the subfield of Latin American Philosophy and its practitioners might have towards the subfield of Indigenous philosophy produced in the geographical area of Latin America and those practicing it.

Latin American Philosophy as a subfield is no stranger to being dismissed as a valid set of inquiry within academic circles. The positions presented by authors such as Mariátegui and Salazar Bondy might seem like a good historical representation of a general idea about the classical debates surrounding *what is and what is not philosophy*. Yet, against those views, Latin American Philosophy rose and established itself with all its complexities as a set of views worthy of consideration and as a field representative of the thoughts of a large segment of the world’s population.

I propose that the subfield and its practitioners consider that relatively recent history and embrace some solidarity with other fields from the Global South. In this case, the subfield of Indigenous Philosophy produced in Latin America seems like a logical recipient of such solidarity. Moreover, given the shared geographical space and the

⁶ I do not deny the claim that more has to be done to understand the Andean philosophical system and that the work done regarding Aztec philosophy is, in my opinion, more academically advanced from a point of systemic reconstruction. However, I know of current efforts to develop a systemic approach to Andean philosophy.

shared history of colonization, avoiding extrapolating gatekeeping practices seems like the right path to take.

Latin American Philosophy is intrinsically connected with the history of Europe. That, however, does not diminish the independence of the subfield. On the contrary, as Nuccetelli notices about Sor Juana Inez de la Cruz and José de Acosta, those thinkers' positionality seems like good grounds to consider their work unique and independent from its European predecessors.

But unlike Latin American Philosophy, Indigenous philosophy produced in Latin America does not claim to have broken with Europe as a starting point, nor does it claim a new positionality with regards to European thought to claim its independence. Instead, the issue with this subfield is that it is something completely independent from Europe and its traditions. Yet, the field has been denied a seat at the table for far longer than others, and when allowed to participate, it was as if it were a subset of Latin American Philosophy. The reasons for it might be various, but dismissing an entire set of metaphysical views that have not been properly considered seems like a strong contender for an explanation. Another possible reason is that Latin American Philosophy also carries the seeds of European thought. A tradition that impregnates with colonial thirst many areas it touches. Just as Mariátegui feared was the case.

If Latin American Philosophy does not want to repeat the same crimes of colonialism that its ancestor, European philosophy, committed against many groups, which included Latin American Philosophy itself, solidarity should follow towards the promotion of research in the subfield of Indigenous Philosophy produced in Latin America. Otherwise, we could declare that Indigenous people in Latin America have only changed the location of their colonial masters from across the sea to next door.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to thank the participants of the University of Alberta Philosophy Colloquium who were kind enough to comment on a previous version of this paper. Likewise, I want to thank those who heard and commented on a more refined version of this paper at the Society for the Advancement of American Philosophy 50th Annual Meeting. Special thanks to Leanne Woodward, Tasneem Alsayyed Ahmad, Michael Giudice, Zeyand El Nabolsy, and Amy Schmitter for providing comments on the first version of this paper. Finally, I want to thank the anonymous reviewers for their work. Their insightful comments and their valid concerns helped me improve this paper.

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