

Chapter 4

From Positivism to “Anti-Positivism” in Mexico: Some Notable Continuities

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Over roughly the past fifty years, a general consensus has emerged in the scholarship on Latin American thought dating from the latter half of the nineteenth century through the first quarter of the twentieth. Latin American intellectuals widely adapted the European philosophy of positivism in keeping with the demands of their own social and political contexts, effectively making positivism the second most important philosophical tradition in the history of Latin America, after scholasticism.¹ However, as thinkers across Latin America faced the challenges of the twentieth century, they grew increasingly disappointed with positivism, so that “anti-positivism” stands out as a defining feature of Latin American philosophy in the early twentieth century.² In this essay, I challenge or at least add nuance to this widely accepted narrative by demonstrating considerable continuity rather than simple rupture between positivism and “anti-positivism” in Latin America. I focus on Mexico, where both positivism and the reaction against it are generally taken to have been strongest,³ or at least most politically significant.⁴ After tracing the history of positivism’s transformations in Mexico from Auguste Comte (1798-1857) to Gabino Barreda (1818-1881) to Justo Sierra (1848-1912), I show how Mexico’s leading “anti-positivist” philosophers—José Vasconcelos (1882-1959) and Antonio Caso (1883-1946)—draw substantially upon their positivist predecessors.

The Scholarly Consensus: From Positivism to Anti-Positivism

More than any other scholar, Leopoldo Zea is responsible for establishing the basic meta-narrative of the rise and fall of positivism, first in the context of Mexico—in *El positivismo en México* (1943) and *Apogeo y decadencia del positivismo en México* (1944)⁵—and then throughout Latin America in *Dos etapas del pensamiento en Hispanoamérica* (1949).⁶ According to Zea, positivism began gaining traction in Mexico in 1867 by promising to solve pressing social

and political problems, but it eventually proved inadequate to the task given new social disturbances.⁷ While the precise problems and timelines differ across other Latin American countries, Zea's basic narrative framework remains consistent: "Hispanic-American countries interpreted positivism in various ways, always in keeping with the most urgent problems which they were attempting to solve."⁸ Positivism initially seemed to produce "an order based upon science, an order concerned with the education of its citizens and the attainment for them of the greatest material comfort."⁹ But soon "a mute discontent was felt in many social spheres, and there was talk of the materialism of the age, of egotism as its personification. Education was not reaching all the social classes. Comfort was not enjoyed by all members of society."¹⁰ Anti-positivism grew out of the disappointment that accompanied these harsh realities, eventually culminating in a revolution in the Mexican context.

I do not wish to challenge the outline of Zea's historical narrative, which interprets the various Latin American positivisms as failed practico-theoretical attempts to reconcile much older problems stemming largely from the history of colonialism. There are good reasons for the scholarly consensus that has emerged based upon Zea's careful work, the continuing force of which is represented across many works, including many of the essays in the present volume.¹¹ Nonetheless, I wish to complicate the received narrative of "positivism," which is remarkably deceptive as a singular noun. As the narrative of positivism's rise and fall has grown increasingly entrenched, it has become easier to miss the plurality of positivisms that emerged across Latin America. This has occurred in spite of the fact that Zea and other early scholars of positivism pointed out crucial differences between positivisms. For example, Arturo Ardao wrote: "Latin-American positivism not only is different from the European, but it varies from one country to another.... There is no single Latin American Positivism."¹² This is the sort of point that tends to get lost as positivism fades from being a topic of active philosophical inquiry and becomes the headword of more encyclopedic articles that for the sake of brevity fall back upon the established meta-narrative describing Latin America's turn from positivism (1850-1900) to anti-positivism (beginning in 1900).¹³

Multiplying Positivisms and Calling "Anti-Positivism" into Question

In contrast, I would like to suggest that much of what gets described as Latin American "anti-positivism" might be fruitfully interpreted as distant adaptations of positivism, especially if we emphasize the later writings of positivism's foun-

der Auguste Comte and track the changes positivism underwent between its initial popularization and the later reactions against it. In fact, there is a fascinating slippage that occurs frequently in scholarly narratives that deal with Latin American positivism: 1) *Comte* is acknowledged as the founder of positivism;¹⁴ 2) *Comtean positivism* is adapted to a particular Latin American context—often by rejecting whole portions of Comte's thought, such as the religion of humanity—to form a nationally specific positivism¹⁵; 3) *national positivism* undergoes further changes under the influence of evolutionary thought, especially Herbert Spencer's; 4) *evolutionary positivism* comes up against increasing opposition; until 5) *anti-positivism* becomes a distinguishing feature of thought in the region.¹⁶ Notice that by the time "anti-positivism" appears, the "positivism" that it is reacting against has reached its fourth or even fifth instantiation!¹⁷ Given the substantive slipperiness of "positivism" in this narrative, I would like to ask: what relation does "anti-positivism" bear to the multiplicity of positivisms that preceded it, including Comte's original positivism? Or more simply: *which* positivism is "anti-positivism" against? Or might there actually be continuity between certain positivist themes and so-called "anti-positivism"?

The bulk of my essay addresses these questions, but I want to raise two further preliminary complications: 1) after Comte's death, "positivism" is increasingly used as a pejorative term, which tends to set up a straw-man; 2) even among Comte's followers, there is a deep disagreement over what to make of his later works. Clear evidence of both complications appears in John Stuart Mill's 1865 evaluation of Comte's positivism.¹⁸ Mill begins by describing how positivism has come to take a central place in contemporary philosophical debates. While he was describing the situation in Europe, the same need to define one's position in relation to positivism quickly spread throughout much of Latin America, including Mexico. The conceptual problem is that the term *positivism* is "better known through the enemies of that mode of thinking than through its friends."¹⁹ In fact, this point still obtains in most contemporary scholarship on Latin American positivism. The term *anti-positivism* gives the impression that it stands in stark opposition to a clearly defined philosophical movement—such as *positivism*—but this is a verbal illusion. Indeed, the reverse is more likely to be true: positivism has come to be defined *negatively* by anti-positivism in light of the dramatic distance between the promises of positivism and what it historically delivered. In short, our quest to understand positivism is shaped by the largely negative conclusions scholars have reached concerning positivism's intellectual achievements and political influence.²⁰

To further complicate matters, there was a pre-existing struggle over the meaning of positivism even among Comte's supporters. In fact, the majority of those who recognized Comte as the founder of their own positivist schools tended to alter or even altogether dismiss some positions expressed in his later

works, which elevated the sentiment of love over scientific knowledge and elaborated the religion of humanity as a means of fostering moral progress throughout the world.²¹ Despite Comte's explicit insistence that his later works were not just consistent with, but actually the fulfillment of his earlier works,²² many thinkers who had become positivists based upon Comte's earlier, more scientific work expressed opinions similar to Mill: "Instead of recognizing, as in the *Course de Philosophie Positive*, an essentially sound view of philosophy, with a few capital errors, it is in their general character that we deem the subsequent speculations false and misleading."²³ Mill presents the later Comte as having more or less lost his mind, coming forth "transfigured as the High Priest of the Religion Humanity," fundamentally different from "the *savant*, historian, and philosopher of his fundamental treatise."²⁴

Simply put, two Comtes emerged: an early and a late, usually taken to correspond to a good and a bad.²⁵ Even Comte's immediate successors in France fought over how to move forward with Comte's vision after his death. Émile Littré, who was primarily responsible for popularizing Comte's early works, distanced positivism from the religion of humanity. In contrast, Comte's literary executor, Pierre Laffitte, worked to propagate it. Between the enemies of Comte's positivism and even some of its ostensible friends, Comte's later reflections on love and the religion of humanity were obscured, so that the scholarly conception of positivism up to the present day corresponds primarily to his earlier work.²⁶

This is a crucial point given that my final three sections will argue for considerable continuity between the "anti-positivism" of Vasconcelos and Caso and Comte's mature positivism. But first, in the next two sections, I will examine the two intervening generations that adapted positivism to Mexico's circumstances. Scholars agree with Zea's claim that Mexican positivism was Comtean at its inception.²⁷ However, Zea also carefully documented how the socially Darwinist positivism that later Mexican intellectuals like Vasconcelos and Caso reacted against was very different.²⁸ Unfortunately, this change in the meaning of positivism is often overlooked in discussions of "anti-positivism," many of which nevertheless draw upon Zea's overall thesis that the Mexican bourgeoisie used positivism as an ideology to maintain colonial forms of oppression while creating new ones. The question, once again, is *which* positivism was used in this way? Or, *which* positivism was "anti-positivism" against?

Gabino Barreda and Comtean Positivism

Gabino Barreda was primarily responsible for spreading positivism in Mexico by founding the National Preparatory School in Mexico City in 1868 and making a modified form of Comte's positivism the basis of its curriculum.²⁹ In the previous year, during his famous "Civic Oration,"³⁰ Barreda had caught the attention of Mexico's president Benito Juárez. Barreda's aim was "to extract, according to the counsel of Comte, the great social lessons offered by all these painful collisions that anarchy, which currently prevails in our spirits and ideas, provokes all around us."³¹ After the chaos of the Reform War and the French Intervention, Juárez was especially receptive to Barreda's invocation of Comte's motto of "Order and Progress." Having taken courses with Comte in Paris from 1849 to 1851, Barreda understood social disorder to be a direct reflection of intellectual and spiritual disorder, but he showed little direct interest in Comte's desire to inculcate altruism via the religion of humanity.³² Nevertheless, Barreda sought to achieve the very same end through educational reform, a task that he was officially assigned by Juárez. The resulting *ley orgánica* sought to reorganize Mexico's educational system in its entirety, in order to restructure Mexican society and civilization itself. Barreda's attempt to unite the various fields of knowledge was even more encyclopedic than Comte's, and was met with general approval by Comte's successor Laffite.³³

Given the future evolution of positivism in Mexico—that is to say its transformation by the *científicos* during the Porfiriato, discussed in the section below—Barreda's reflections on moral education are less frequently discussed than his reflections on scientific education. Just as scholars have tended to downplay the fact that Comte's later writings describe how a systematic scientific education must serve the higher causes of moral, social, and spiritual transformations, Barreda's positivism is often caricatured as a form of scientism. But as his essay "About Moral Education" makes clear, Barreda sought to place all education in the service of moral, social, and spiritual progress, just like Comte.³⁴ In this essay, Barreda attempts to place morality on a firm foundation by separating it from religious dogma. He claims that Condorcet's dream of discovering the origins of morality in human nature rather than the supernatural has been realized as psychology has begun to study the human capacity to have our "egoistic tendencies exploded in favor of the common good."³⁵ Drawing upon Comte's criticism of theological and metaphysical explanations, Barreda writes: "What the Apostle Paul placed outside of us—i.e., the benevolent inclinations of love, veneration, kindness, and humility—*science*, after eighteen centuries of laborious ascension, has come to find in our own being."³⁶ In other words, taking these moral phenomena as given in our experience, the question of moral

education is this: how can we further develop the morality of the individual, and even the human species as a whole?

Barreda's answer, which draws directly upon Comte's, is that we must allow our immoral tendencies to atrophy while actively cultivating our altruistic tendencies. Barreda summarizes these "moral gymnastics" as follows:

Here is the final and positive object of the moral art, an object that will be won with the practice of good actions and the incessant repression of bad ones.... And with the examples of morality and true virtue that will be presented with art in the schools, exciting in the pupils the desire to imitate them, we are doing nothing more than allowing moral desire to arise spontaneously and insensibly in them.³⁷

While the minds' of pupils should be prepared by scientific study, their moral education does not ultimately rest upon intellectual precepts or the fear of punishment but rather the gradual cultivation of sympathetic instincts until they so preponderate that "love becomes the irresistible guide of all our actions."³⁸ This sentiment is identical to that of the later Comte, who presented the fundamental aim of his *System of Positive Polity* to be "in accordance with the essential purpose of true philosophy, to systematize human life as a whole on the principle of the subordination of the intellect to the heart."³⁹

Admittedly, there are differences between Barreda's positivism and Comte's. For example, Barreda interpreted Mexican liberalism as an expression of the positive spirit, whereas European liberalism represented a negative spirit for Comte.⁴⁰ More dramatically, Barreda seemed to reject the religion of humanity, at least in its cultic form. But in a way, Barreda's attempt to reform education constituted an attempt to shift the domain of the religion of humanity from Comte's priesthood to the educational agencies of the State.⁴¹ In terms of political expediency, Barreda understood that de-catholicizing Mexico was virtually impossible, so he emphasized religious freedom of conscience while seeking to mold the moral conscience of the people into something more uniform using positivism.⁴² However, Barreda famously altered Comte's tripartite motto to read: "Liberty as the *means*; order as the *base*; progress as the *end*."⁴³ By changing the first part of Comte's formula—"Love as the *principle*"⁴⁴—Barreda left pupils free to their own private religious beliefs while nonetheless insisting that they learn the public lessons of a unifying social ethics by studying the lives of the great moralists. In other words, Barreda did not depart from the general thrust of the religion of humanity: educating people into altruism.⁴⁵ Even though he made no room for Comte's religious priesthood, Barreda followed Comte's principle of the wise subordination of the intellect to the heart by treating love as the ultimate end of a positivist education: "The heart, improved and perfected

through the cultivation and growth of benevolent inclinations, should command; the mind, fortified by science, should obey."⁴⁶

After Barreda's death near the beginning of the Porfiriato, Mexico's Preparatoria became more concerned with preparing students for the professions than reconstructing the social order through an education that included the positive transformation of sentiments.⁴⁷ But Barreda also passed positivism on to the next generation of Mexican intellectuals through the *Asociación Metodófila Gabino Barreda*, founded in 1877 with Barreda as president.⁴⁸ However, the philosophical positions held by the second generation of Mexican positivists were quite different from Barreda's own, even though they hailed Barreda as their maestro. One of the most substantial differences was their interest in Spencer's positivism, and the application of Darwinian theory to social problems more generally.

The Evolving "Positivism" of Justo Sierra and the *Científicos*

The second generation of Mexican "positivists" did not shy away from Social Darwinism in spite of Barreda's misgivings.⁴⁹ Miguel Macedo published an essay arguing that wealth was a form of social superiority that easily led to moral superiority.⁵⁰ Manuel Ramos linked evolutionary biology to sociology using the concept of "survival of the fittest."⁵¹ These essays anticipated the bourgeoisie ideology masquerading as positive science that accompanied many of the ideas of the *científicos*, Porfirio Díaz's circle of technocratic advisors.⁵² In any case, the philosophy articulated by the second generation of Mexican "positivists" was *not* that of Comte or even Barreda, even though both were lauded and selectively cited. To mince words, I might refer to this second generation of Mexican "positivists" as "anti-positivists," were the phrase not already used to describe the following generation of the *Ateneo de la Juventud*, who reacted against the Spencerian "positivism" of the *científicos*. For the sake of clarity throughout the remainder of this essay, I reserve the terms *positivist* and *positivism* (without scare quotes) for the philosophies of Comte and Barreda.⁵³

Despite being common, referring to the "positivism" of the *científicos* is misleading.⁵⁴ Moreover, positivism should not be conflated with Porfirism.⁵⁵ Zea wisely notes the irreducible element of ideology involved: "Positivism was not to blame for the evils of Mexico. The positivist ideal was one thing and the reality called Porfirismo was another."⁵⁶ Of course, this is not to deny that the *científicos* called themselves "positivists" and used portions of positivism to legitimate their positions. By emphasizing the importance of the positivist method the *Asociación Metodófila*—literally, the "association of method-lovers"—could set aside substantial elements of Comte's and Barreda's positivist *doc-*

trines.⁵⁷ Not just the religion of humanity, but much of Comte's accompanying ethical and political doctrines were ignored, alongside Barreda's dream of educating Mexicans into altruism. As a communitarian offshoot of Saint-Simonism, the original ethics and politics of positivism—which subordinated the interests of the individual to those of society—simply did not suit the interests of the Mexican bourgeoisie.⁵⁸

Justo Sierra, the chief spokesperson for the *científicos*, gave the clearest expression to his generation's attempt to establish order from 1880 to 1910. His most famous work, *Evolución política del pueblo mexicano*, was written at the turn of the century.⁵⁹ While it seems to echo Barreda's positivist philosophy of Mexican history, Sierra's version is almost completely recast in terms of Spencer's theory of evolution:

We have taken as our premise the concept that society is a living being and consequently grows, develops, and undergoes transformations; these transformations are continuous, and their celerity is in ratio to the internal energy with which the social organism reacts to external elements, assimilating them and utilizing them in the course of its growth. Science, converted into an amazingly complex and efficient tool, has accelerated a hundredfold the evolution of certain peoples.⁶⁰

By “scientifically” studying the history of the Mexican people, Sierra and the other *científicos* sought to accelerate their evolution through a kind of social engineering. According to Zea: “Political order and economic liberty was the ideal of this group,” which “did not see order as ultimate end, but rather as an instrument in the service of the interests of the individual.”⁶¹

The Spencerian philosophy of the *científicos* and Barreda's Comtean positivism were thus worlds apart in crucial respects, as further explained by Zea:

Comtian positivism, regardless of Barreda's efforts, did not justify the freedom that was of paramount interest to the future Mexican bourgeoisie: the freedom to acquire wealth without any restrictions other than the ability of each individual.... The Mexican bourgeoisie theorists soon found a theory which justified their interests. It was the theory of the English positivists John Stuart Mill and Herbert Spencer, especially the latter, and with them Charles Darwin's evolutionism.⁶²

Simply put, the *científicos* rejected much of the ethical and political doctrine of Barreda's Comtean positivism while modifying Spencer's evolutionism to suit their interests.⁶³ Comte's sociology, like Spencer's, had prescribed an evolutionary course for humanity understood as a social organism, but there was a

fundamental difference in how each understood this “evolution.”⁶⁴ Comte, who coined the term *altruism* and claimed that positivist morality could be summarized in the motto “live for others,”⁶⁵ would never have invoked Spencer's phrase “survival of the fittest.” Likewise, Barreda argued that it was necessary to “humanize the rich” through moral education, since “society has put wealth in their hands for the common good and common progress.”⁶⁶ But the *científicos* continued to twist free of positivism's moral injunctions, as Zea explains: “The *científicos* did not try to adapt the interests of the Mexican bourgeoisie to the principles of positivism. On the contrary, they adapted the principles of positive philosophy to the interests of the Mexican bourgeoisie.”⁶⁷ Thus, although the *científicos* made Comte's “Order and Progress” the slogan of their newspaper *La Libertad*—the title was a nod to Barreda's “liberty as the means”—the editors stressed “the necessity of adopting the scientific bases of the evolutionary school as point of departure for judging our social and political state.”⁶⁸

However, not all of the *científicos* were crass Social Darwinists. For example, as Martin Stabb notes: “Sierra's intellectual honesty and basic open-mindedness are especially evident in his analysis of Mexico's educational needs.... Underlying his many essays, articles, and speeches on education is a simple idea: people, virtually all people, are educable.”⁶⁹ In spite of the differences already discussed, a considerable degree of continuity from Comte to Barreda to Sierra appears in the domain of education, which all three thinkers understood to be crucial for the future of their nations and humanity as a whole. This is not to deny that Sierra's adaptation of Spencer was racist; he certainly considered both the *indios* and *criollos* to be backward.⁷⁰ Nevertheless, Sierra's view stands out as less racist than many of his contemporaries who held that Indians were *not* educable, since they were deterministically “inferior.” Similarly, in contrast to those who argued for the racial superiority of the *criollos*, Sierra held that the real agents of progress in Mexico were the *mestizos*, whom he also identified with the bourgeoisie: “The mestizo family, called to absorb in its bosom the elements that begot it, in spite of the errors and vices explained by its youth and lack of education, has constituted the dynamic factor in our history.”⁷¹ In order for this “absorption” to continue, Sierra believed that Mexico needed to attract more immigrants from Europe to mix with Mexico's indigenous population and develop an effective educational system that was free, public, obligatory, and universal.⁷² In short, while Sierra altered Barreda's Comtean vision of educational progress based upon his racialized Spencerian view, he was more careful in his reading of Spencer than many of the other *científicos*, and even willing to cite Comte to distance himself from the crasser Social Darwinists.⁷³

In any case, Sierra and the other *científicos* judged that Porfirio Díaz was needed to secure the order necessary to make progress possible, since only he had managed to found “the political religion of peace” amidst Mexico's chaotic

history.⁷⁴ As the embodiment of the mestizo middle class, Díaz appears as the nation's savior in Sierra's narrative. Supported by "the submission of society in all its active elements" to create a "social dictatorship,"⁷⁵ only Díaz could make Mexico strong enough to avoid being economically dominated by the United States. Barreda's ordering of terms—"Liberty as the *means*; order as the *base*; progress as the *end*"—was fundamentally altered as political liberty was deferred until the future, transformed from a means to an end. Whereas the ideas of liberalism were an anachronism according to Barreda's positivism, Sierra viewed them as utopic.⁷⁶ The economic and political order that Díaz made possible was presented as the next step in the natural social and political evolution of Mexico. According to Zea, the *científicos* maintained "the Darwinian thesis of the fittest.... Spencer condemned all intervention that tended to nullify this principle, such as charity or any other form of help for the less fit. The state's mission was to protect the interests of the fittest."⁷⁷ In turn, the fittest members of Mexican society—the bourgeoisie mestizos—would advance Mexico's evolution, completing its transition to becoming a fully industrial society.⁷⁸

Unfortunately for the *científicos*, Díaz was not interested in being anyone's instrument. Although his rule continued to confer various material advantages upon the Mexican bourgeoisie, it became increasingly difficult to believe that his rule constituted progress for the Mexican people as a whole. At the same time, intellectual criticisms of the *científicos*' "positivism" grew in both number and power. Given this disappointment, Sierra publicly moved towards what has been called "anti-positivism" in a 1908 address in honor of Gabino Barreda.⁷⁹ However, I contend that Sierra was following in the positivist footsteps of both the later Comte and Barreda by questioning the assumption that scientific knowledge was everything. Like his positivist predecessors, Sierra came to believe that science must ultimately be transmuted into positive sentiment:

On top of the sciences immense edifices of ideas have been erected that, by explaining the universe and the destiny of man, have taken on all of the aspects of metaphysical systems. They have served to fortify and repair all the passions because the good fortune of ideas is and always will be to convert themselves into sentiments, the only means of moving the heart of peoples.... Flying like banners over all arguments, they are called spiritualism, materialism, positivism, and agnosticism today, pragmatism tomorrow.⁸⁰

Zea and others have taken Sierra's speech to mark a crisis in Mexican positivism.⁸¹ Rather than appearing as a definitive science in Sierra's speech, positivism "appears as one more philosophy, what we today call an ideology."⁸² But there is an overlooked continuity in the fact that Comte, Barreda, and Sierra

each sought to transform the ethical and political lives of their peoples (and humanity as a whole) by instituting a better system of education,⁸³ which would include not just scientific or technical instruction but a moral instruction that would result in the transformation of sentiments. While both Barreda and Sierra had forgone Comte's religion of humanity as a means for cultivating the love of humanity, and Sierra eventually placed positivism on par with other philosophies for achieving it, Comte's vision of ethical and political transformation by means of an education in altruism was still intact, as Sierra's speech indicates:

By perseverance in the efforts of acquiring knowledge, one feeds and develops the faculties, thus organizing the training of the will, the exteriorization of character. By the practice of method, one acquires the notion of the necessity of order, as well as the love of truth, by way of one's scientific initiation. And by loving truth, one is prepared to love the good.⁸⁴

This passage suggests that it is too simplistic to say that Sierra came to oppose positivism. He had only come to realize that its vision stood in opposition to the ideology of Porfirism, which needed to be fought with the help of other philosophical traditions.

Questioning the "Anti-Positivism" of Mexico's Atheneum of Youth

According to most scholars, "anti-positivism" was well established in Mexico by 1909, when the *Ateneo de la Juventud* was officially founded. This new generation of intellectuals—which included Antonio Caso and José Vasconcelos—is said to have "rejected the positivism of their teachers."⁸⁵ Rather than further modifying positivism like the generation of the *científicos* did using Spencer, this new generation supposedly revolted against positivism by drawing from other philosophical traditions altogether, such as those of Schopenhauer, Bergson, Nietzsche, James, and Rodó.⁸⁶ Given this influx of non-positivist intellectual influences and the unfolding revolutionary political landscape, the reign of positivism as Mexico's semi-official ideology undoubtedly ended with the *Ateneo*. Nevertheless, there are striking yet generally overlooked continuities between positivism and the philosophies of the two leading Mexican "anti-positivists," José Vasconcelos and Antonio Caso.⁸⁷ While both men were anxious to establish themselves as part of a new and original generation of philosophers, they also acknowledged their intellectual debts to Barreda. Moreover, the initial activities of the *Ateneo* were made possible by Sierra himself.⁸⁸ Finally, as I argue further below, even the mature philosophies of Vasconcelos and Caso

cannot be understood apart from their education in positivism, which they sought to sublimate rather than simply negate.

For all of these reasons, it would be more accurate to refer to the “anti-Positivism” rather than the “anti-positivism” of this new generation of Mexican intellectuals, whom I will subsequently refer to as the *ateneístas*. In fact, as the Porfiriato neared its end, positivism was no longer *positively* defined by Comte, Barreda, or even Sierra. Positivism was coming to be defined *negatively* by its opposition. This point is nicely illustrated by Oscar Martí’s recent summary of one of the most famous “anti-positivists,” Uruguay’s José Enrique Rodó, whose book *Ariel* had a profound influence on Latin American intellectuals of the early twentieth century, especially the *ateneístas*: “Rodó believed that positivism considered only the material elements of the world and treated ethics as but a justification for the pursuit of economic gains. Left out were art and poetry, the imagination and ideals, compassion and humanity.”⁸⁹ This is a fair characterization of Rodó’s philosophical polemic, but it is also an utter mischaracterization of positivism, at least as articulated by Comte, Barreda, and the later Sierra.

The *ateneístas* sought to philosophize for themselves, but it is unlikely that they could completely escape their early philosophical training in positivism, as Zea and the term “anti-positivism” suggest.⁹⁰ As a point of historical fact, the *ateneístas* were savvier than this, working to criticize positivism from within. For example, Antonio Caso’s 1909 series of seven lectures in the Preparatoria appears utterly positivist in terms of its *method*, even as it criticizes some of the positivist *doctrine*. Caso’s decision to offer his critique only after providing a panoramic view of positivism’s history hearkens back to the “method-loving” society of Barreda and fits perfectly with Comte’s own description of the positivist method: “In order to understand the true value and character of the Positive Philosophy, we must take a brief general view of the progressive course of the human mind, regarded as a whole, for *no conception can be understood otherwise than through its history*.”⁹¹ Guillermo Hurtado’s explanation of the thrust of Caso’s lectures is thus perceptive: “Caso’s purpose in his lectures was to offer an *historical* vision of positivism with the aim of clarifying how much of this doctrine was salvageable and how much needed to be superseded.” In other words, Caso’s 1909 lectures were an extension of Sierra’s 1908 so-called anti-positivist turn, but the *method* both thinkers used to criticize positivism was itself the legacy of Barreda’s positivist philosophy of education, as institutionalized in the Preparatoria where Caso had studied history under Sierra.

Like the later Sierra, Caso portrays positivism as something to be supplemented or even superseded rather than negated. This is clear in his 1910 lecture on the moral philosophy of Eugenio María de Hostos,⁹² a Puerto Rican philosopher deeply influenced by positivism. Like Barreda, Hostos maintained that “the

‘ideal of the good’ surges up as a natural product of the environment.”⁹³ Intellectuals should not try to peer behind or underneath the appearance of moral phenomena. Rather, by following the positivist method that combines elements of empiricism and rationalism, they should construct a moral philosophy “on the basis of the affirmation of the perennial order that reason discovers in the intimate relations of things.”⁹⁴ This moral philosophy can and should in turn serve as the foundation for a national education system like the one Hostos implemented in the Dominican Republic, or the one Barreda established in Mexico. However, there is a problem with this positivist system, as Caso explains:

It is true that by obeying the concomitant inspirations of the experientialist and positivist currents of contemporary philosophy, the moralist negates all ethics founded on metaphysical postulates. But the principle that he admits, according to which existence effectively fits inside of completely logical formulations—the idea of an eternal harmony between society and the physical environment in which it develops, the concept that erects the ought in “the spontaneous deduction of all relations that link us with the external world, the internal world, and the social world”—these are without a doubt deterministic and intellectualistic metaphysical postulates.⁹⁵

Here, Caso offers an internal critique of Hostos’ positivism (and Barreda’s, by extension).⁹⁶ What Hostos claims as the rational unfolding of a scientific philosophy is called a *deus ex machina* by Caso. Perhaps even more surprisingly, Caso cites Comte for philosophical support, effectively rooting himself *inside* of the positivist tradition in order to go beyond it: “Auguste Comte was the first philosopher of the experientialist tradition who, contrary to the received inheritance of naturalism, affirmed the irreducibility of each order of natural laws to the others, whether superior or inferior.”⁹⁷

While Caso does not invoke Comte’s later work in this lecture, he is just as captivated by the claim that love is higher than science when he writes: “No, the human soul *is more* than reason; it is what the history of the species exhibits in the symbolic forms of heroism and love.”⁹⁸ Comte would fully endorse this quotation, even if he would not embrace Caso’s metaphysical notion of human freedom. In any case, Caso saw something enduring in the positivist moral philosophy of Hostos, “the awareness that there remains the task of adequately completing his mission, the example of his existence consecrated to the ‘demanding religion of duty,’” a phrase that hearkens back to the positivism of the later Comte.⁹⁹ Although Caso’s mature philosophy developed a decidedly metaphysical interpretation of this “demanding religion of duty,” his aim was still remarkably continuous with the later Comte’s positivism, as I will demonstrate in the final section below.

According to Guillermo Hurtado, Vasconcelos’ 1910 lecture, “Gabino Barreda and Contemporary Ideas,”¹⁰⁰ is even more important for understanding the

“anti-positivism” of the *ateneístas*.¹⁰¹ In Hurtado’s estimation, Vasconcelos sought “to repudiate the bases of Spencerian evolutionism with which the group of establishment intellectuals known as the ‘*científicos*’ justified the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz as a necessary evil.”¹⁰² Hurtado’s point is that “positivism” had come to refer to “the whole system of ideas that were used to legitimate the exercise of power by the *científicos* and Porfirio Díaz himself.”¹⁰³ But as established above, this is more accurately labeled “anti-Porfirism,” at least if we are to take the historical roots of positivism seriously, as Vasconcelos does. His attempt to “specify the state of contemporary thought” by uncovering its historical origins is methodologically positivist, just like Caso’s lecture series.¹⁰⁴ In positivist fashion, Vasconcelos also interprets Barreda’s attempt to cultivate a national spirit by way of a positivist education as a necessary historical stage that moved Mexico beyond the philosophy of scholasticism.¹⁰⁵ Although “Barreda and positivism did not give us everything we longed for,” the “abyss between the ideas of yesterday and today,” is not between Vasconcelos and Barreda’s Comtean positivism, which had salutatory moral effects on Mexico.¹⁰⁶ The break is between Vasconcelos and the Spencerian philosophy of the *científicos*. Vasconcelos make this more nuanced and specific “anti-positivism”—which I have been calling “anti-Porfirism”—clear when he says that it was Spencer (not Comte) who up until very recently “was the official philosopher among us.”¹⁰⁷ Of course, I am not suggesting that Vasconcelos or the other *ateneístas* were satisfied by positivism. Rather, Vasconcelos is negating the ideology of Porfirism, while sublating aspects of Barreda’s and Sierra’s positivisms.¹⁰⁸ More simply put, Vasconcelos finds positivism as a whole to have been necessary but not sufficient for his generation’s intellectual growth.

Vasconcelos ends his lecture with a method for judging whether a philosophical system should be accepted. In a move that once again suggests he is intellectually uneasy about departing too far from the “method-loving” company of Barreda, Vasconcelos lays out three meta-theoretical norms to guide the philosophical quest for truth, even when it turns to metaphysics: 1) “The fundamental intuition of the philosophical system must never be in disagreement with scientific laws”; 2) “The synthesis must never infringe upon the formal laws of logic”; and 3) “The moral consequences of the system are ... a confirmation of its vitality.”¹⁰⁹ Once we recognize that all three of these meta-theoretical norms were shared by Comte, Barreda, and the later Sierra, Vasconcelos’ closing reflections—often cited as evidence of his “anti-positivism”—appear in a different light:

With the prudence suggested by the norms just studied, we have attempted to receive new ideas. The positivism of Comte and of Spencer could never contain our aspirations. Today, since it is in disagreement with the data of science itself, we find it lacking in vitality and reason.¹¹⁰

To say that positivism could not contain the aspirations of the *ateneístas* is perfectly compatible with their aspirations having been shaped by positivism. It is also compatible with what Vasconcelos called the *ateneístas* “intellectual revolution,” since they did launch an assault on the ideology of Porfirism and the social Darwinism of the crasser *científicos*.¹¹¹

Positivism and Jose Vasconcelos’ Cosmic Race

With respect to Vasconcelos’ philosophy, two things are widely agreed upon. The first, which I challenged in the section above, is his being classified as an “anti-positivist.” The second is that *La raza cósmica*, first published in 1925, is his most influential work. Therefore, I would like to highlight some of the continuities between this work and the positivisms of Comte, Barreda, and Sierra in order to show that my interpretation is not restricted to Vasconcelos’ early years as an *ateneísta*. It bears repeating that I am not denying the fact that Vasconcelos’ work has genuinely anti-positivist strains. My concern is only to show how Vasconcelos reimagined some key positivist themes.

In fact, the central thesis of *La raza cósmica*—“that the various races of the earth tend to intermix at a gradually increasing pace, and eventually will give rise to a new human type”—simply does not make sense apart from the backdrop of positivism.¹¹² As Didier T. Jaén notes:

“Order and progress” the motto of Positivism, did not cease to be the motto of Mexican society after the Revolution. What the Revolution did was to change the basis of that order and to widen the field of social progress.... Nor was Vasconcelos opposed to that motto either, only that “progress” for Vasconcelos reached beyond economic welfare: Order and progress were not ends in themselves but the basis for an ideal future development.¹¹³

The fact that Vasconcelos’ vision culminates in a new “Aesthetic Age” undoubtedly challenged the values of the *científicos*. But despite drawing upon non-positivist philosophical vocabularies, Vasconcelos’ vision ends with a refigured humanity ruled by love. This vision lines up perfectly with that of the later Comte, who was equally interested in “an ideal future development” for humanity. Of course, given his own context, Vasconcelos replaces Comte’s chief protagonists—France, Europe, and whites—with Mexico, Latin America, and *mestizos*: “[America’s] predestination obeys the design of constituting the cradle of a fifth race into which all nations will fuse with each other to replace the four races that have been forging History apart from each other ... unity will be consummated there by the triumph of fecund love.”¹¹⁴ As this passage demonstrates,

Vasconcelos' philosophy of history is no less sweeping or utopic than that of Comte, Barreda, or Sierra. Like Comte, Vasconcelos sought to be a great synthesizer with a cosmopolitan vision; like Barreda, he saw an overarching, transnational purpose flowing through the stages of Mexican history; and like Sierra, he saw the mestizo as the chief protagonist in this world-historical drama.¹¹⁵ Following his positivist predecessors, Vasconcelos also believed that knowledge must be placed in the service of love, since the highest purpose is "the mission of fusing all peoples ethnically and spiritually."¹¹⁶

Vasconcelos claims that this mission will be accomplished given "the law of the three social stages."¹¹⁷ Although this phrase "is not to be taken in the Comtian sense," it still sounds suspiciously like the later Comte's. Vasconcelos admittedly places more emphasis on the aesthetic, but both thinkers imagine the dominant principle of the world moving from the material/warlike, to the intellectual/political, to the spiritual/loving. Moreover, Vasconcelos' refigured Humanity, the "cosmic race" that is able "to live joy grounded on love" as it is "ruled by sympathy," can only be reached through a long process of moral education,¹¹⁸ much like the one that Comte inspired Barreda to develop. Sierra's blending of philosophy of education and racial logic is also evident when Vasconcelos writes: "Inferior races, upon being educated, would become less prolific, and the better specimens would go on ascending a scale of ethnic improvement, whose maximum type is ... that new race to which the White himself will have to aspire."¹¹⁹ Finally, Vasconcelos' prophecy, hearkening back to the Saint-Simonian roots of positivism, culminates in "the redemption of all men."¹²⁰

In stark contrast to Vasconcelos' philosophy, "The official policy and the Positivists' science, which was directly influenced by that policy, said that the law was not love but antagonism, fight, and the triumph of the fittest."¹²¹ Clearly, Vasconcelos' criticism of the "Positivists' science" here is not directed at Comte's or Barreda's positivism, given their philosophies of education, which claimed that only love is capable of producing a new Humanity. Vasconcelos' criticism is directed against the *científicos*, although not against science as such, since he combats "the vulgarity of Spencerian Darwinism" by citing new scientific discoveries in mathematics, physics, chemistry, and biology.¹²² In positivist fashion, Vasconcelos sought to place the entirety of human knowledge in the service of the spiritual reformation of a future Humanity ruled by what Comte called "Love as principle." But like Sierra, Vasconcelos modified the original positivist philosophy of history in light of evolutionism. The difference is that rather than drawing upon Spencer, Vasconcelos drew upon Bergson. Nonetheless, as was the case for Sierra, Latin America's mestizos play the lead role in Vasconcelos' sweeping narrative of the creative evolution of the cosmic race: "Only the Iberian part of the continent possesses the spiritual factors, the race, and the territory necessary for the great enterprise of initiating the new universal era of Humanity.... We have all the races and the aptitudes. The only thing lacking is for true love to organize and set in march the law of History."¹²³ Vascon-

celos was mystified by the appearance of the generous act, which "in the midst of the meanness of the universe, is the strangest contradiction of the facts."¹²⁴ But in spite of the widespread tendency to label him as an "anti-positivist," Vasconcelos' vision of a cosmic race that would no longer be characterized by such meanness drew upon the positivist philosophies of Comte, Barreda, and Sierra.

Positivism and Antonio Caso's Reflections on Existence as Charity

In contrast to Vasconcelos, Caso sought to understand the existence of altruism in the universe at the level of the individual and ultimately gave up on notions of collective progress.¹²⁵ But like Barreda, the later Sierra, and Vasconcelos, Caso held a version of Comte's positivist belief that altruistic acts were the highest pinnacle of human achievement, and sought to implement an educational system that would help create moral individuals.¹²⁶ While Caso sought inspiration from other philosophical traditions including vitalism, pragmatism, and phenomenology, his later works explicitly acknowledge his intellectual debts to Comte, Barreda, and Sierra, and he even positions himself as a "critical positivist." Since other scholars have documented the real breaks between Caso and the positivists,¹²⁷ I will continue focusing on the continuity.

Caso's works are voluminous, but the primary axis of his thinking is expressed in *La existencia como economía, como desinterés y como caridad*. First published as a brief essay in 1916, Caso added considerably to it in 1919, and substantially revised it in 1943, noting that the essay had constituted his life's preoccupation (3:viii). As John Haddox notes, the force of Caso's preoccupation with altruism in these years is particularly fascinating when we consider that he wrote when "memories of the 'biological-evolutionary' defense of the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz and the violence of the Mexican revolution were still strong, and when World War I [and later, World War II] had just ended."¹²⁸ As Caso wrote in 1941: "*Humanity has forgotten love*. It no longer thinks of works of charity, but of works of egoism" (8:153; italics in original).

Existence as Economy, as Disinterest, and as Charity is an attempt to fully express the ruthless struggle for existence in which human beings find themselves as biological animals, while nonetheless making more visible the aspects of human experience that are disinterested and meditating upon the remarkable human capacity for altruism. In his preface, Caso writes that he was inspired by "the evolution of Christian ideas and sentiments through the centuries" (3:27). However, he aims to understand Christianity not by the lights of its theologians, but by way of its moral exemplars, constituting "a kind of cult to heroes and the heroic" (3:27). This is utterly positivist, in the tradition of Comte's new calendar and system of social worship based on the lives of great historical individuals,¹²⁹ with its pedagogical counterpart in Barreda's system of moral education. Caso outlines the significance of some great moral and religious figures, presenting

their lives as a testament against the bitter contemporary world, which typically “exalts force, domination without scruples, life without law” (3:29).

Caso’s first three chapters detail the powerful forces of biology and economics, although he is ultimately more interested in the human world of aesthetic, moral, and religious values. These aspects of human existence persist alongside and even in spite of the aspects of the world that are characterized by endless biological strife and economic struggle. In other words, the biological-economic processes described by Darwin and Spencer are indeed founded in experience, where organisms obey the law of life—characterized by conscious or unconscious egoism—adapting themselves to achieve “maximum gain with minimal effort” (3:43). This is *existence as economy*, and it is utterly real. However, to claim that this is the *only* aspect of existence, as many of the *científicos* did, is ideology. In contrast, Caso seeks to philosophize on the basis of *all* experience, and so his middle three chapters articulate *existence as disinterest*, just as his final three chapters celebrate *existence as charity*.

Philosophically, this constitutes Caso’s “metaphysical voluntarism, that is, the preference for action over idea, for life over reason as a fundamental principle” (3:44). Still, Caso never denies the biological perspective, and he freely admits what he calls the “economic theory of knowledge,” which is roughly the utilitarian, pragmatic, and positivist principle that knowledge serves the will, that “intelligence is the faculty of creating tools” (3:50). However, our being is not fully expended in being tool-using animals; rather, “human surplus makes man a *possible instrument* of culture, heroism, and sainthood” (3:44). In order to understand this surplus, Caso argues for a return to speculative metaphysics, which requires philosophy “to combine scientific methods and results with the truths of intuition” (3:61).

An examination of how Caso draws upon the work of Bergson and Husserl to develop his notion of intuition exceeds the scope of this essay. My aim is simply to explain the way that Caso presents Comtean positivism as something to be sublated, rather than simply negated. His tripartite narrative of post-Kantian philosophy presents Hegel as thesis, Comte as antithesis, and Husserl as synthesis. Quoting a passage from Hegel that resonates with the *Ateneo de la Juventud*, Caso writes:

Above all, I call upon *the spirit of youth*, because it is the blessed time in life ... when man can occupy himself freely in science and love it with a disinterested love, when the spirit has still neither taken a negative and superficial attitude toward truth, nor lost itself in critical, vacuous and idle investigations.... *In the face of this love, the universe must reveal itself* (quoted in 3:65; first set of italics added).

In contrast to Hegel, “positivism arises and affirms the relativity of knowledge, negating the metaphysical competence of reason” (3:65). For Comte this

was not to condemn human intelligence to ignorance, but rather “to liberate it forever, obligating it to adhere to scientific, *positive* investigations where it could always achieve success in proportion to its energy” (3:66). Yet precisely what Comte portrays as *positive*, Caso describes as *negative*: “The error of positivism consists in having arbitrarily selected the data of experience. *True positivism, which complies with pure experience, will have to admit with Husserl, against Comte, that there are universal objects, which constitute ‘the ultimate data of intuition’*” (3:67).

Just like Vasconcelos did in *La raza cósmica*, Caso outlines three historical stages, placing Comtean positivism in the second stage. Although both *ateneístas* distinguish their three stages from Comte’s, their final stages nevertheless resemble Comte’s vision of a humanity transformed by love. Caso and Vasconcelos also resemble one another in giving art a greater role to play in accomplishing this transformation. As Caso writes: “Art, compared with the biological imperative of expending the least effort, appears as a shocking waste, a violent and mysterious antithesis” (3:70). Caso argues that the logic of science—neatly expressed in Comte’s famous formula of *savoir pour prévoir, prévoir pour pouvoir* [“know in order to foresee, foresee in order to control”]—cannot easily account for the way that art breaks the closed circle of vital interest and disrupts the economy of existence.¹³⁰

The remainder of Caso’s essay is a reflection on the world as charity, or the fact that “heroic altruism” is possible. He claims that positivism’s scientific orientation could not give a satisfactory philosophical account of the very altruism it counseled because it remained metaphysically agnostic. Given that it is loving *action*, rather than scientific *knowledge*, that constitutes the height of human existence, Caso writes:

Charity is a fact just like struggle. One does not demonstrate it, one practices it, does it, like life.... You will never have the intuition of order that opposes biological life, you will never understand existence in its profound richness, you will mutilate it endlessly, if you are not charitable. Fundamental intuitions must be lived (3:100).

Apart from intricate questions about Caso’s doctrine of intuition or his metaphysics, which exceed the scope of this paper, Caso agrees with Comte that highest human achievement is to “live for others”: “Charity consists of going out of oneself, in giving oneself to others, in yielding oneself, lavishly, without fear of exhausting oneself” (3:97-98). In short, Caso’s fundamental moral intuition lines up with Comte’s later attempts to “place the intellect in its proper place; adjusting it in that wise subordination to the heart which forms the condition of all harmonious growth.”¹³¹ In turn, the later Comte would agree with Caso’s words: “Reader: what you read here is only philosophy, and philosophy is an

interest of knowledge. Charity is action. Go and commit acts of charity. Then, besides being wise, you will be a saint" (3:106).

Of course, Caso understood that moral education required more than exhortations, which led him to respond to Barreda's philosophy of education. In *History and Anthology of Philosophical Thought* (1926), Caso writes: "Educated in positivism, we will honor the memory of our educator [Barreda]. It will always have been good for us to have substituted the Comtean doctrine for scholasticism" (6:298). However, Caso criticizes Barreda's educational system for failing to live up to his teacher Comte's aim of "subordinating the intellect to the heart":

In this sense, the entire work of Gabino Barreda is truncated and frustrated. It is not enough to form the intellect; it is necessary to form the will.... Our 'National' Preparatory School, just as Barreda envisioned it, did not form anything but the intellect (and even this imperfectly, because human understanding without metaphysical culture will always be a diminished understanding), never sentiment and the will! (6:299).

This passage suggests that far from being a simple "anti-positivist," Caso sought to sublate Barreda's Comtean undertaking in the domain of moral education.

Against Comte, Caso makes the metaphysical claim that, like everything else in the universe, man is fundamentally an *individual*. Even *humanity*, which positivism understood as a social organism, is comprised of human individuals. Nonetheless, as John Haddox notes, "Caso asserts that the very spirituality of the human person is only realized in a society based on the moral union of men."¹³² In other words, the unity of *humanity* is not a metaphysical reality; it is a moral ideal. Still, Caso rejoins the positivists when he suggests that the goal of moral education is to steer each individual toward altruism, toward moral sainthood. Although Caso was no more enamored than Barreda was with Comte's religion of humanity as a cultic apparatus, Caso seeks to integrate its moral aims into a system of education that would recognize that "there is no manner of forming a perfect man with primers and formulas, but there does exist a mode of integrating the spirit by sympathy and by conviction" (4:11).

This had also been Barreda's aim, but in Caso's judgment Barreda's Preparatoria had failed to properly shape the sentiment and will of its students. As for the result, "The man educated intellectually, only intellectually, only by pure thinking, is a profound egoist" (4:13). Caso does not explicitly tie this point to the way that Barreda's Preparatoria had inadvertently produced the *científicos*, who leant intellectual legitimacy to *porfirismo*, an ideology of "existence as economy." But he does insist that education must cultivate the other aspects of human existence, such as disinterest and charity:

If we wish, then, to make men in the schools, let us form individual souls, form good animals, improve the race, forming men who are beautiful and ready for action. But at the same time ... let us make man charitable. Let us make him artistic.... Then we will then have achieved the ends of education (4:16-17).

In sum, Caso's educational aims with respect to morality line up quite closely with Comte's and Barreda's (and as his views on scientific education are quite close to Sierra's).

The difference lies in their respective metaphysics. Just as Caso denies metaphysical status to Comte's humanity as a unified superorganism, he recasts Barreda's notion of freedom, which Zea summarized as follows:

Barreda did not believe that the individual was free to do what he wished. Freedom ought to be subordinate to the interests of society.... Thus, the state should intervene, as an instrument of society, in the moral education of Mexicans. It must prepare Mexicans to be good civil servants by stimulating their altruistic sentiments.¹³³

Zea was highly critical of the way that Barreda tried to reconcile individual freedom with social necessity because he effectively, albeit unintentionally, paved the way for the abuses of Porfirism when he wrote: "Liberty, far from being irreconcilable with order, consists, in all phenomena, both organic and inorganic, in submitting fully to the laws that determine those phenomena."¹³⁴ In contrast, Caso's metaphysics of freedom turns Barreda's logic on its head: "We are free when we negate ourselves in a centrifugal movement, when we heroically abdicate our individual prerogative" (3:113). The biological and economic laws of animal life command egoism, whereas disinterest and charity constitute the rejection of these laws. Because altruism must be freely chosen, Caso writes: "The good is not a categorical imperative, a law of reason, like Kant thought, but rather an enthusiasm. It does not command ... it inspires" (3:96). In Caso's philosophy, we thus return full circle to Comte's summary of the subjective principle of positivism as "the subordination of the intellect to the heart."

Summary and Postscript: From Positivism to "Critical Positivism" in Mexico

In the first section, we saw that the later Comte believed this positivist principle of altruism to be even more crucial than his earlier epistemology, philosophy of history, or philosophy of science, which have nevertheless received more scholarly attention. Next, we explored how Barreda's philosophy, the historical foundation of positivism in Mexico, drew upon Comte's ethical and political aims while nonetheless rejecting his religious means. In turn, we saw how the next generation of Mexican "positivists," the *científicos*, altered Barreda's Comtean positivism in keeping with their own economic and political aims, which they supported through a creative misreading of Spencer. In contrast to the crasser social Darwinism of many other *científicos*, we examined Sierra's narrative concerning the evolution of the Mexican people, noting how he made mestizos his chief protagonists and eventually came to realize that the ideology of Porfirism must be supplanted. As the section on the *ateneístas* suggested, Caso and Vasconcelos sought to do just this, but given their historical sense of intellectual indebtedness to the legacies of Comte, Barreda, and Sierra, I suggested calling them "anti-Porfirists" rather than "anti-positivists." To further support this change in label, my final two sections attempted to show how Vasconcelos' *La raza cósmica* and Caso's *La existencia como economía, como desinterés y como caridad* cannot be understood apart from the way that they seek to sublimate rather than negate various elements of positivism.

In keeping with this observation, I want to conclude by briefly considering Caso's alternative narrative of his relation to positivism near the end of his career in *Positivism, Neopositivism, and Phenomenology* (1941). Caso's narrative begins with the classical positivism of Comte and Mill but ends in two vastly different philosophical traditions: the neopositivism of the Vienna Circle and the "critical positivism" of phenomenology. That Caso wants to distance himself from the logical positivism of the Vienna circle is perhaps unsurprising, but his willingness to embrace a form of "critical positivism" contradicts the typical, but wrongheaded characterization of him as a simple "anti-positivist." In fact, Caso embraces the moral direction of Comte's later works where "the synthesis of the fundamental sciences is subordinated to the mystical love of humanity" (7:128), a sentiment that also marks Vasconcelos' work. Caso is nevertheless critical of Comte's "arbitrary selection of experience, which translates into partially skeptical attitudes towards metaphysics and religion" (7:131). This "arbitrary selection of experience," which was made even more arbitrary and selective by the *científicos*, functions practically as a negation of disinterest and charity, which cannot be intellectually demonstrated or deduced but must be lived, experienced, or intuited. In short, Caso's internal critique of Comte's positivist method is that it is not sufficiently *positive* to describe, much less achieve, the altruistic doctrine that it advocates. So rather than negate positivism, Caso seeks to sublimate it

in his "critical positivism." In the final passage of the book Caso writes, "We will always remain within positivism," but instead of negating certain aspects of experience, Caso encourages us to "admit its vast complexity" (7:173). With respect to the history of both "positivism" and "anti-positivism" in Mexico, I suggest that we do the same.

NOTES

1. Leopoldo Zea, *The Latin American Mind*, trans. James H. Abbott and Lowell Dunham (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963), 26.
2. Carlos Beorlegui, *Historia del pensamiento filosófico latinoamericano* (Bilbao: Universidad de Deusto, 2008), 361.
3. On the strength of positivism's influence on Mexico, see *ibid.*, 311. The claim that anti-positivism was most comprehensive in Mexico is made by Michael A. Weinstein, "Anti-Positivist Thought in Latin America," in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (1998), 305.
4. Many scholars see a connection between the philosophical rejection of positivism and the political rejection of dominant regimes in early 20th century Mexico. See, for example, Enrique Dussel, "Philosophy in Latin America in the Twentieth Century: Problems and Currents," in *Latin American Philosophy: Currents, Issues, Debates*, ed. Eduardo Mendieta (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 13; Guillermo Hurtado, "The Anti-Positivist Movement in Mexico," in *A Companion to Latin American Philosophy*, ed. Susanna Nuccetelli, Ofelia Schutte, and Otávio Bueno (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 82.
5. Leopoldo Zea's two volumes on Mexico were republished in a single volume: Leopoldo Zea, *El positivismo en México: nacimiento, apogeo y decadencia* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1968). Only the first volume has been translated into English as *Positivism in Mexico*, trans. Josephine H. Schulte (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1974).
6. Translated as *The Latin American Mind*.
7. Leopoldo Zea, *Positivism in Mexico*, 20.
8. Leopoldo Zea, *The Latin American Mind*, 29.
9. *Ibid.*, 33.
10. *Ibid.*, 34.
11. The works that have drawn upon Leopoldo Zea's analyses of positivism are too numerous to list. Multiple articles throughout two recent edited volumes demonstrate Leopoldo Zea's continuing scholarly influence: Enrique Dussel, Eduardo Mendieta, and Carmen Bohórquez, eds., *El pensamiento filosófico latinoamericano, del Caribe y "Latino" (1300-2000)* (México: Siglo XXI, 2009); Susanna Nuccetelli, Ofelia Schutte, and Octavio Bueno, eds., *A Companion to Latin American Philosophy* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009).
12. Arturo Ardao, "Assimilation and Transformation of Positivism in Latin America," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 24, no. 4 (1963): 515.

13. The precise dates given by scholars for the shift from positivism to anti-positivism differ, but 1900 coincides both with the publication of Jose Enrique Rodó's *Ariel* and the scholarly penchant for dividing history into centuries. See Ralph Lee Woodward, ed. *Positivism in Latin America, 1850-1900* (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath and Company, 1971). Many scholars also choose 1910 as the decisive year, since it coincides with the Mexican Revolution.
14. The almost universally accepted claim that Comte founded positivism is usually held to be compatible with the claim that "as soon as its influence began to be felt in Hispanic America, [various Latin American intellectuals] recognized it as the philosophy whose principles they had upheld without any previous direct contact with the movement." Leopoldo Zea, *The Latin American Mind*, 129.
15. The metaphor of Latin American thinkers "adapting," rather than "adopting," positivism is widespread, but expressed especially clearly in Arturo Ardao's, "Assimilation and Transformation of Positivism in Latin America."
16. Here is another description of this progression: "The presence of positivism went through three well-differentiated phases: an initial phase, represented above all by the influence of Comte; a second, in which the influence of Spencer substitutes for that of Comte; and a third ... in which decadence and the disappearance of this influence results." Carlos Beorlegui, *Historia del pensamiento filosófico latinoamericano*, 267; translation mine. This developmental history is common, but some scholars speak of competing currents instead: "Three main currents were in evidence: autochthonous positivism indigenous to the region and concerned with local social and political issues, social positivism derived from Auguste Comte and stressing the historical nature of social change, and evolutionary positivism influenced by Herbert Spencer and asserting the biological nature of society." Oscar R. Martí, "Positivist Thought in Latin America," in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (1998), 565.
17. One may or may not count the "autochthonous positivism" mentioned by Martí in the note above. For objections to this notion, see Francisco Larroyo, *La filosofía Iberoamericana* (México: Porrúa, 1989), 102.
18. John Stuart Mill, *Auguste Comte and Positivism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1961).
19. *Ibid.*, 2.
20. As recent of these negative conclusions, consider the titles of two recent essays: Stephen Cologero, "Why Positivism Failed Latin America," *Inter-American Journal of Philosophy* 3, no. 1 (2012). In the present volume, Levinson, "Positively Disastrous: Implementing Comte's Ideology in Mexico 1876-1910."
21. See Andrew Wernick, *Auguste Comte and the Religion of Humanity: The Post-Theistic Program of French Social Theory* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).
22. On Comte's belief in the continuity of his corpus, see the section "The Two Comtes" in *ibid.*, 31-37.
23. Mill, *Auguste Comte and Positivism*, 4-5.

24. *Ibid.*, 125. Like most scholars after him, as well as Comte himself, Mill attributes this dramatic change to Comte's utterly passionate, yet always "morally pure," devotion to Madame Clotilde de Vaux. In contrast, a recent intellectual biography of Comte argues against this presupposition. Mary Pickering, *Auguste Comte: An Intellectual Biography*, 3 vols. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 1:5.
25. The trend of positing two Comtes is summarized in Michel Bourdeau, "Auguste Comte," ed. Edward N. Zalta, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2011), <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2011/entries/comte/>.
26. *Ibid.*
27. Leopoldo Zea, *Positivism in Mexico*, 23.
28. *Ibid.*, xiii.
29. On Gabino Barreda's impact on the Mexican education system, see W. Dirk Raat, "Auguste Comte, Gabino Barreda, and Positivism in Mexico," *Aztlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies* 14, no. 2 (1983); Albert J. Delmez, "The Positivist Philosophy in Mexican Education, 1867-1873," *The Americas* 6, no. 1 (1949).
30. Gabino Barreda, "Oración cívica," in *Opúsculos, discusiones y discursos* (México: Imprenta del Comercio de Dublán y Chávez, 1877).
31. *Ibid.*, 82; translation mine. Hereafter, all translations of quotations from Spanish sources are mine. I quote and cite English translations when available.
32. See W. Dirk Raat, "Agustín Aragón and Mexico's Religion of Humanity," *Journal of Inter-American Studies* 11, no. 3 (1969).
33. W. Dirk Raat, "Auguste Comte, Gabino Barreda, and Positivism in Mexico," in *Aztlán, A Journal of Chicano Standards*, Vol. 14, No. 2, 1963, 246-47.
34. Gabino Barreda, "De la educación moral." For a comparison of Gabino Barreda's moral philosophy and Comte's, see Oscar R. Martí, "Gabino Barreda and Moral Philosophy," *Aztlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies* 14, no. 2 (1983).
35. *Ibid.*, 110.
36. *Ibid.*, 114.
37. *Ibid.*, 112.
38. *Ibid.*, 113.
39. Auguste Comte, *System of Positive Polity*, trans. Richard Congreve, 4 vols. (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1875-77), I:xxxv.
40. Leopoldo Zea, *Positivism in Mexico*, 41.
41. Albert J. Delmez, "The Positivist Philosophy in Mexican Education, 1867-1873," in *The Americas*, Vol. 6, No. 1, 1949, 33.
42. Leopoldo Zea, *Positivism in Mexico*, 54-56, 103.
43. Gabino Barreda, "Oración cívica," 109.
44. Auguste Comte, *The Catechism of Positive Religion*, trans. by Richard Congreve, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1891 and 1909, 429.
45. Leopoldo Zea, *Positivism in Mexico*, 99.
46. Quoted in *ibid.*, 153.
47. Albert J. Delmez, "The Positivist Philosophy in Mexican Education," 44.

48. See Leopoldo Zea's section "The Development, 'The Disciples'" in *Positivism in Mexico*, 139-79.
49. See Gabino Barreda, "Consideraciones sobre la teoría de Darwin," in *Anales de la asociación metodófila "Gabino Barreda"* (México: Imprenta del Comercio de Dúblan y Chávez, 1877).
50. Miguel S. Macedo, "Ensayo sobre los deberes recíprocos de los superiores y de los inferiores," in *Anales de la asociación metodófila "Gabino Barreda,"* México City: Imprenta del Comercio de Dúblan y Chávez, 1877.
51. Manuel Ramos, "Estudio de las relaciones entre la sociología y la biología," in *Anales de la Asociación Metodófila "Gabino Barreda,"* México City: Imprenta del Comercio de Dúblan y Chávez, 1877.
52. Leopoldo Zea, *Positivism in Mexico*, 166.
53. My choice to reserve the term *positivism* for the philosophies of Comte and Gabino Barreda is basically stipulative. They are certainly the original positivists in their respective contexts, but my argument does not depend upon the claim that there is something more essentially "positivist" about their philosophies than the later philosophy of, for example, Herbert Spencer.
54. The difference between the common tendency to identify the *científicos* with the positivists, and the more nuanced insistence upon their differences is reflected in a single sentence by Martin Stabb, who describes the *científicos* as "hard-headed 'men of science' who professed the tenets of French positivism; or stated more accurately, the Mexicanized version of Comtian thought, generously augmented by the social organicism of Herbert Spencer and the latter-day Darwinists." Martin S. Stabb, *In Quest of Identity: Patterns in the Spanish American Essay of Ideas, 1890-1960* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1967), 7; italics added.
55. Leopoldo Zea, *Positivism in Mexico*, 17.
56. *Ibid.*, 221. To be fair, Leopoldo Zea continues: "But, if it is true that one thing was the ideal and another thing was the reality, one cannot deny that positivism, as the generation of the Athenaeum saw it, was used as a tool for the reality called Porfirismo. *Positivism provided the weapon by which to justify a series of acts contrary to the positivist ideal*" (221; italics added). I do not deny Leopoldo Zea's claim that a theory is ultimately responsible for the practices it engenders or legitimates. However, my aim here is simply to track various Mexican "positivisms" and "anti-positivisms" in relation to their original sources: Comte and Gabino Barreda.
57. Leopoldo Zea, *Positivism in Mexico*, 365-66.
58. *Ibid.*, 403.
59. Justo Sierra, *The Political Evolution of the Mexican People*, trans. Charles Ramsdell (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1969).
60. *Ibid.*, 343.
61. Leopoldo Zea, *Positivism in Mexico*, 403.
62. Leopoldo Zea, *The Latin American Mind*, 280.

63. See Levinson's essay in the present volume for a discussion of how the *científicos* "wove into positivism a common misunderstanding of the doctrine of Herbert Spencer."
64. For Comte's description of the "evolution of humanity," see Auguste Comte, *The Positive Philosophy of Auguste Comte*, trans. Harriet Martineau (New York: Cambridge University Press, [1853] 2009), 95.
65. Comte, *The Catechism of Positive Religion*, 26, 39.
66. Gabino Barreda, "Informe presentado a la Junta Directiva de Estudios," in *Opúsculos, discusiones y discursos*, 127.
67. Leopoldo Zea, *Positivism in Mexico*, 237.
68. Quoted in Leopoldo Zea, *El positivismo en México*, 301.
69. Martin S. Stabb, "The Essay of Nineteenth-Century Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean," in *The Cambridge History of Latin American Literature, Vol. 1*, ed. Roberto González Echevarría and Enrique Pupo-Walker (Cambridge University Press, 1996), 596.
70. To be fair, Comte's positivist doctrine of human progress was also racist. See, for example, his discussion of how the religion of humanity would spread from the "white races" of Western Europe to the "less advanced" races across the globe. Comte, *System of Positive Polity*, I:313-17. Nevertheless, Comte also held that the "highest affection for humanity" was "incompatible with any feeling of hatred towards other races" (I:568).
71. Justo Sierra, *Obras completas: Ensayos y textos elementales de historia*, ed. Agustín Yáñez, vol. 9 (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1991), 131.
72. Justo Sierra, *The Political Evolution of the Mexican People*, 368.
73. Sierra criticizes those who "exaggerate the consequences of [Spencer's] sociological premises" and cites Comte to defend his own view that "the social state is much more modifiable by human action" in Justo Sierra, *Obras completas: La educación nacional*, ed. Agustín Yáñez, vol. 8 (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1991), 111-12.
74. Justo Sierra, *The Political Evolution of the Mexican People*, trans. by Charles Ramsdell, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979), 359.
75. *Ibid.*, 366.
76. *Ibid.*, 368.
77. Leopoldo Zea, *Positivism in Mexico*, 408-09.
78. Justo Sierra, *The Political Evolution of the Mexican People*, 344.
79. Justo Sierra, *Obras completas: Discursos*, ed. Agustín Yáñez, vol. 5 (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1991).
80. *Ibid.*, 359.
81. See, for example, Carlos Beorlegui, *Historia del pensamiento filosófico latinoamericano*, 386.
82. Leopoldo Zea, *Positivism in Mexico*, 437.
83. Alfonso Reyes linked the practical careers of Gabino Barreda and Sierra with respect to developing Mexico's educational system in his prologue to Sierra, *The Political Evolution of the Mexican People*, 7.
84. Justo Sierra, *Obras Completas: Discursos*, 394.

85. Guillermo Hurtado, "The Anti-Positivist Movement in Mexico," 82.
86. *Ibid.* See also Leopoldo Zea, *Positivism in Mexico*, 438.
87. I focus on Vasconcelos and Caso because they are widely considered to be the most important Mexican philosophers of their generation. See Jorge J. E. Gracia, *Latin American Philosophy in the Twentieth Century: Man, Values, and the Search for Philosophical Identity* (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1986), 41.
88. Nicola Miller, *In the Shadow of the State: Intellectuals and the Quest for National Identity in Twentieth-Century Spanish America* (London: Verso, 1999), 45.
89. Oscar R. Martí, "Early Critics of Positivism," in *A Companion to Latin American Philosophy*, 68.
90. Leopoldo Zea, *Positivism in Mexico*, 14.
91. Auguste Comte, *The Positive Philosophy of Auguste Comte*, I; italics added.
92. Antonio Caso, "La filosofía moral de Don Eugenio M. de Hostos," in *Conferencias del Ateneo de la Juventud*, ed. Juan Hernández Luna (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1962).
93. Quoted in *ibid.*, 31; italics in original.
94. *Ibid.*, 31.
95. *Ibid.*, 37.
96. Interpreting Caso's lecture as an indirect response to Gabino Barreda is suggested by Guillermo Hurtado, "The Anti-Positivist Movement in Mexico," 86.
97. Caso, "La filosofía moral de Don Eugenio M. de Hostos," 37.
98. *Ibid.*, 38; italics in original.
99. *Ibid.*, 39-40.
100. José Vasconcelos, "Gabino Barreda y las ideas contemporáneas," in *Conferencias del Ateneo de la Juventud*, edited by Juan Hernández Luna, (México City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1962), 97-113
101. Guillermo Hurtado, "The Anti-Positivist Movement in Mexico," 88.
102. *Ibid.*, 87.
103. *Ibid.*
104. The quoted phrases are from Vasconcelos, "Gabino Barreda y las ideas contemporáneas," 98.
105. *Ibid.*, 99.
106. *Ibid.*, 101. Vasconcelos attributes three enduring moral values to Gabino Barreda, who took them from Comte: the solidarity of humanity, altruism, and the cult of ancestors.
107. Vasconcelos, "Gabino Barreda y las ideas contemporáneas," 102. Guillermo Hurtado writes that the appearance of Spencer, rather than Comte, at this point in Vasconcelos' lecture appears "almost as if it were a mere slip." Guillermo Hurtado, "The Anti-Positivist Movement in Mexico," 88. In contrast, my suggestion that Vasconcelos be understood more as an "anti-Positivist" than as an "anti-positivist" would make sense of why he chooses Spencer as the representative thinker in this passage.

108. Vasconcelos' need to pay intellectual homage to Gabino Barreda in his lecture title speaks for itself. On Vasconcelos' connection to Sierra, see Guillermo Hurtado, "The Anti-Positivist Movement in Mexico," 91.
109. José Vasconcelos, "Gabino Barreda y las ideas contemporáneas," 111.
110. *Ibid.*, 112.
111. Vasconcelos complains about "the vulgarity of Spencerian Darwinism" in José Vasconcelos, *The Cosmic Race: A Bilingual Edition*, trans. Didier Tisdell Jaén (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 23.
112. *Ibid.*, 3.
113. *Ibid.*, xv.
114. *Ibid.*, 18.
115. See Joseph Ferraro, "Progress through the Cosmic Race: A Mexican Philosophy of History," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 19, no. 4 (1979).
116. Vasconcelos, *The Cosmic Race*, 19.
117. *Ibid.*, 28.
118. *Ibid.*, 29. For more on the continuities between Gabino Barreda and Vasconcelos with respect to educational reforms in Mexico, see John Skirius, "Gabino Barreda, Vasconcelos, and Mexican Educational Reforms," *Aztlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies* 14, no. 2 (1983).
119. José Vasconcelos, *The Cosmic Race*, 32.
120. *Ibid.*, 35.
121. *Ibid.*, 36.
122. *Ibid.*
123. *Ibid.*, 38-39.
124. José Vasconcelos, "Gabino Barreda y las ideas contemporáneas," 106.
125. Antonio Caso, *La existencia como economía, como desinterés y como caridad in Obras completas*, ed. Rosa Krauze de Kolteniuk, 11 vols. (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1971), 3:95. Subsequent citations of Caso's work are from his *Obras completas*, given parenthetically with the volume number preceding the page number. The translations are mine.
126. On Caso's impact on the Mexican education system, see John H. Haddox, *Antonio Caso, Philosopher of Mexico* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971), 7-9.
127. For instance, John Haddox divides Caso's philosophical career into three stages: 1) early positivism; 2) middle social pragmatism; and 3) later metaphysical personalism. *Ibid.*, 13. In contrast, I believe that significant continuity appears if we foreground the positivism of the later Comte and bear in mind that Caso took Comte to be a forerunner of pragmatism.
128. *Ibid.*, 30.
129. Tables of Comte's "Social Worship" as well as his "Positivist Calendar" are found in Comte, *The Catechism of Positive Religion*, 296; 302-03.
130. Comte also held that art was important, but he believed that its role was fundamentally instrumental or pragmatic: "All esthetic study ... may become a useful moral exercise, by calling sympathies and antipathies into healthy play." Comte, *System of Positive*

- Polity*, trans. by Richard Congreve, 4 volumes, London: Longmans, Green, and Company, 1855-1857, I:228. Caso refuses to make art a mere moral instrument, but he does agree with Comte that the moral world is "higher" than the aesthetic world.
131. *Ibid.*, lxxxiv.
132. John Haddox, *Antonio Caso*, 37.
133. Leopoldo Zea, *Positivism in Mexico*, 99.
134. Gabino Barrera, "De la educación moral," 113. Quoted in Zea, *Positivism in Mexico*, 98.

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