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Identity and Latin American Philosophy

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The question of identity and Latin American philosophy has been a topic of intense discussion among Latin Americans. It has two major parts. The first concerns the identity *of* Latin American philosophy itself; the second concerns how identity has been discussed *in* Latin American philosophy. The first may in turn be divided into at least two sub-topics: whether in fact there is such a thing as Latin American philosophy and how best to conceive it. The division of the second depends on the identity of which things have been discussed by Latin American philosophers. Most important among these is the identity of the Latin American peoples, and especially of ethnic, racial, and national identities. This chapter concentrates on views about the identity of Latin American philosophy, but it adds some historical discussion of positions Latin Americans have taken with respect to an overall Latin American identity, as opposed to particular ethnic, racial, or national identities. The chapter begins with a discussion of identity, and then moves on to the problem posed by the notion of Latin American philosophy, four general approaches dealing with the problem, and a brief historical account of how the problem has been discussed in Latin America.

Identity

In spite of widespread use in common parlance, the term 'identity' is erudite in origin. It is a transliteration of the Latin *identitas* (in turn a derivative of *idem*). The corresponding term of English (Old Norse) origin is 'sameness' (in turn a derivative of 'same'). For all intents and purposes, these terms are equivalent in meaning. Whether one says that something is identical to something else or says that something is the same as something else generally makes no difference.

Identity is one of the most versatile notions in our ordinary conceptual framework. We apply it to all sorts of things, such as colors, persons, times, spaces, relations, essences, experiences, events, and concepts. We speak of persons or their lives as being identical or as being of an identical type; we say that a daughter is identical to her mother with respect to this or that characteristic; we refer to the use of identical concepts in thought; we agree that sometimes we have identical experiences; and we talk about being in identical places at the same time, being essentially identical, and witnessing

identical events. In contemporary philosophy in particular, identity is most often discussed in the context of persons. In short, a very large number of examples could be given here to illustrate the usefulness and pervasiveness of this notion in everyday discourse, but for our purposes the examples provided should suffice.

The notion of identity is obviously related to the notion of similarity. Indeed, it is not unusual to find authors who use 'identical' (or its rough synonym, 'same') and 'similar' interchangeably. This is so because in ordinary language we do use these terms interchangeably on some occasions. For example, we sometimes say that two red-colored objects have identical color, even though the shades of red in question might be different. In this sense, there is no difference between identity and similarity. But it is likewise true that we often entertain and use notions of identity and similarity which are not quite equivalent. Indeed, in the very example just used, we also say that the two red-colored objects are similar in color precisely because the particular shades of red are different.

Important distinctions can be made between the notions of identity and similarity. Perhaps the key distinction is that similarity occurs always in the context of difference. For two things to be similar, they must also be different in some respect, although the difference in question must refer to aspects other than those on which the similarity is based. One may speak of two persons as being similar provided that they differ in some way. If they do not differ in any way, then they are regarded as identical, i.e., as the same person. The conditions of similarity of two things, say X and Y, may be expressed in the following way:

> X is similar to Y if and only if X and Y: (1) have at least one feature that is identical in both and (2) also have at least one feature that is not identical in both.

For the sake of convenience, features are understood very broadly in this formulation. They may include anything that may be said of a thing and thus not only qualities, but also relations, position, temporal location, states, and actions.

In contrast with similarity, identity does not require – indeed it precludes – difference. This does not mean that two things could not be regarded as identical with respect to some feature and different with respect to something else. A daughter, for example, may be identical to her mother with respect to hair color while being different with respect to personality. The point is, however, that for the daughter and the mother to be identical with respect to hair color, their hair color must not involve any difference whatsoever. If there were some difference, so that one were, say, lighter than the other, one would more properly speak instead of a "similarity of hair color." We might express this understanding of the identity of two things, say X and Y, and the identity of their features in the following two propositions:

> X is identical to Y, if and only if there is nothing that pertains to X that does not pertain to Y, and vice versa.
>
> X is identical to Y, with respect to a particular feature F, if and only if there is nothing that pertains to F in X that does not pertain to F in Y, and vice versa.

The first formula expresses what might be called *absolute identity*, because it applies to the whole entity in question; the second expresses what might be called *relative identity*, because it applies only to some feature(s) or aspect(s) of an entity.

Part of the reason for the frequent blurring of the distinction between identity and similarity in English discourse is that a single term, 'difference,' is often used as the opposite of both, even though there exists another term that more properly expresses the opposite of similarity: 'dissimilarity.' Similar/different and identical/different are generally regarded as pairs of opposites in English. This usage does not necessarily extend to other languages, however. In the Middle Ages, for example, a concerted effort was made to keep the notions of similarity and identity separate, and this was supported by the use of two opposite terms for each. 'Difference' (*differentia*) was used, at least in most technical philosophical discourse, as the opposite of 'similarity' (*similaritas*), whereas 'diversity' (*diversitas*) was used as the opposite of 'identity' (*identitas*).

The notions of identity and non-identity presuppose each other; they are interdependent in the same way that the notions of cat and non-cat are. Cat is significant as long as non-cat is, and vice versa. If in fact there were nothing that could not be a cat, the very notion of cat would lack relevance. Indeed, in a world of multiplicity such as ours, the identity of something implies its non-identity with something else.

Not all identity about which we speak is of the same sort, however. There are at least four fundamental but distinct kinds of identity: *achronic*, *synchronic*, *diachronic*, and *panchronic*. *Achronic identity* is identity irrespective of time, whereas synchronic, diachronic, and panchronic identities have to do with time: *synchronic identity* applies at a particular time; *diachronic identity* applies at two (or more, but not all) times; and *panchronic identity* applies at all times.

These four kinds of identity generate four different problems that apply to Latin American philosophy. One is atemporal: What makes Latin American philosophy what it is? A second is temporal, but abstracts from the passage of time: What makes Latin American philosophy what it is at time t (where t is replaced by any particular time that is appropriate: now, last year, or two hundred years ago)? A third both is temporal and takes into account the passage of time: What makes Latin American philosophy what it is at times t_n and t_{n+1}? And a fourth is temporal but applies to all times: What makes Latin American philosophy what it always is?

In all four cases what is sought are sets of conditions: necessary conditions without which Latin American philosophy is not what it is, and sufficient conditions that distinguish Latin American philosophy from other things. In principle, the sets of conditions for achronic, synchronic, diachronic, or panchronic identity could be different, and whether they are or not is part of the debate. From what was said earlier, it follows also that, if there is such a thing as Latin American philosophy, then there is also something that is not; for what constitutes the identity of something is also presumably what sets it apart from others. Identity is bound up with difference. Now, this claim should be understood both metaphysically and epistemically: Metaphysically, it means just what it says, that identity and non-identity (or difference) are interdependent; epistemically, it means that the understanding of identity is bound up with the understanding of non-identity.

Identity of Latin American Philosophy

The notion of a Latin American philosophy has been a subject of heated controversy for most of the twentieth century. In order to understand the issues involved in this controversy, we may begin with a question: Why ask what Latin American philosophy is? The reasons why we ask questions vary considerably. Questions have many purposes, and their purposes often reveal something about the kind of answers that those who ask them seek to provide. Aristotle noted long ago that the purpose, that is, what he called *telos*, determines both what something is and its function. The *telos* of a human being, for example, is the acquisition of a certain kind of knowledge. This *telos* determines both what is distinctive of humans (rationality) among other similar beings (animals) and their function (to reason). If we take this idea seriously in the case we are considering, we should expect that there might be differences in what is considered Latin American philosophy among those who study it, depending on the purposes they have in mind. Teachers will primarily have a pedagogical aim, and consider their object of study differently perhaps than historiographers. And something similar could be said about those who have an ideological aim or those who search for validation and authenticity.

In the case of some other subjects, perhaps there might not be significant differences, because the objects of study have fairly well-established boundaries and the goal pursued is also agreed upon. When we are concerned with cancer, for example, matters appear easier, at least in principle, insofar as the overall aim of the study of cancer is to cure and eradicate the disease. Anything that contributes to this aim is fair game to the investigator.

But Latin American philosophy poses difficulties, because the purpose in studying it is not so clear or uniform, and what qualifies as Latin American philosophy is not well established. True, some authors and texts are clearly part of Latin American philosophy in the broad sense I am using here and regarded as such by everyone. No one disputes that Antonio Caso, Risieri Frondizi, Leopoldo Zea, and Francisco Miró Quesada are Latin American philosophers. Although there are disagreements as to the value and originality of their work, this work is uniformly accepted as philosophical and belonging in the canon of Latin American philosophy. Hence, any course on Latin American philosophy can, and perhaps should, include the study of these figures without apology, and the same goes for historiography. Even those motivated by ideology or validation consider them part of the canon, and either use them to support the case they want to make or consider them exceptions of one kind or another to whatever principles they wish to peddle.

It is equally clear that many philosophers do not qualify as Latin American and their work is not part of the corpus of Latin American philosophical texts. Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, René Descartes, and Jürgen Habermas, for example, do not, and no one working on Latin American philosophy would be taken seriously if he or she said that they were part of Latin American philosophy, even though some Latin American philosophers have been heavily influenced by their ideas. References to these authors in works or courses on Latin American philosophy are acceptable, but their philosophy is not studied as Latin American. To understand Frondizi's views on the self, for example, references to Christian von Erhenfels are essential, for Frondizi used this philosopher's

ideas about value and *Gestalt* to develop his own views. But it is obvious that whereas Frondizi is clearly a Latin American philosopher, and part of the Latin American philosophical canon, von Erhenfels is not.

The authors I have mentioned pose no problems for the pedagogue or historiographer of Latin American philosophy. But problems surface when we consider texts and authors such as the *Popol Vuh*, Bartolomé de las Casas, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, Frantz Fanon, and José Gaos.

The problem with the *Popol Vuh* (the book that contains the Maya myth of creation) is twofold. First, it is not a clearly philosophical text in the most widespread Western understanding of the term. After all, there are many texts like this in the Western tradition and they are never included in the philosophical canon. Consider, for example, the Egyptian *Book of the Dead* and the biblical books of Genesis and Job. Even the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are not generally included in courses on the history of philosophy except to illustrate the change that historians of philosophy see between religious and literary texts and the work of the pre-Socratics. If this is so, then why should we include the *Popol Vuh* in the study of Latin American philosophy? Perhaps for the sake of validation, to render philosophical legitimacy to the peoples of Latin America before the Iberians arrived? Or perhaps the issue is ideological, namely, that one wishes to change the way we generally think of philosophy in the West because one has some other idea in mind about the nature of philosophy and its role in the social context.

Bartolomé de las Casas poses a different problem. He is a Spaniard who lived part of his life in Latin America and applied the scholastic philosophy developed in the Middle Ages and practiced during his time in the Iberian Peninsula to the Latin American context, particularly to the question of the humanity and rights of conquered peoples. His place of origin and the philosophical framework that he used count against him being part of the Latin American philosophical canon, but his concern with issues arising from the Latin American context, his advocacy for the wellbeing of Amerindians, and the influence he exerted in the way both Latin Americans and non-Latin Americans think about these issues suggest that he should be included in the canon. Besides, no one can doubt that las Casas's scholastic mode of argumentation fits what is considered philosophical in the West, and the philosophical issues raised by the conquest cannot be raised without mentioning las Casas or his work. His thought is clearly philosophical and inspired by the Latin American situation. Are there other reasons why we should include him in Latin American philosophy? Should we include him for ideological reasons, because he mostly said the right things and defended oppressed Amerindian populations? Should we include him because otherwise Latin American philosophy would not exist at the time, or would not make sense without reference to him? So what do we do with him and why?

The case of Sor Juana is difficult in a different way. She was prevented from writing philosophy in the way that was common at the time because she was a woman. So in a sense we do not have any work from her that can be classified as philosophical, strictly speaking. Yet this prohibition did not prevent her from precisely making a case against the prohibition in rational and rhetorical terms. She also wrote poems that have ethical or moral relevance, although her style, as a humanist, was not what counts as strictly philosophical in the West. Keep in mind that Renaissance humanists have a hard time being included in the Western philosophical curriculum or the philosophical

research canon. When was the last time you saw a course in philosophy that discussed the work of Lorenzo Valla, or a history of philosophy that does more than mention his name as a humanist? So, on what basis should we include Sor Juana in a course on Latin American philosophy, or include her as a figure to be studied in the historiography of Latin American philosophy when similar authors in Europe are generally excluded from consideration in courses and studies of European philosophy? Because she is a woman and we want to validate women's philosophical capacity? Because there is a certain ideological ax that we want to grind? Because the history of Latin American philosophy makes no sense without reference to her?

The case of Frantz Fanon is even more complicated. He wrote in French and was born in Martinique. Does Latin America include this part of the world? Since the French created the term 'Latin America,' I am sure they would answer affirmatively, but few authors take this French part of the Americas into consideration when studying Latin American philosophy, and no anthologies of Latin American philosophy include the work of authors from this part of the Americas. There is, of course, a very serious bias against any author who is not Spanish-speaking. Even Brazilian authors have problems of inclusion. Moreover, anything outside of the Iberian sphere of influence is almost automatically excluded. So, on what basis do we include Fanon: ideology, validation, an expanded version of Latin America?

José Gaos is also a difficult case. He came to Latin America as an older person, fleeing from political instability in Spain, but his impact on Mexico in particular was enormous. No history of Mexican philosophy makes sense without examining this impact, and perhaps no history of Latin American philosophy does either. Moreover, he also appropriated much that could be considered as arising from the Mexican situation; one could argue that he philosophized from a Mexican context. But should we, then, include José Ortega y Gasset (who also had an enormous influence on Latin American philosophy) and Ginés de Sepúlveda (who had no influence but engaged las Casas in a philosophical controversy arising in Latin America)? Can we consider Gaos in the same category as Caso or Frondizi?

Clearly we have no problem including Caso and Frondizi in, or excluding Descartes from, Latin American philosophy, but when we get to las Casas or Sor Juana matters become more difficult. So, what should we do? Who is to be included in Latin American philosophy, what criteria are we going to use to determine inclusion, and how are we going to conceive this philosophy in order to answer these questions?

Four Approaches

Latin Americans themselves, whether residing in the United States or in Latin America, have been concerned with the identity of Latin American philosophy. Two topics are pertinent for our discussion here. One is framed in terms of a question: Is there a Latin American philosophy? Another concerns itself with distinguishing what is frequently called academic and non-academic philosophy, although other terms are also used, such as Western and non-Western, European and autochthonous, genuine and imported, authentic and inauthentic, and so on. Both topics involve an understanding of philosophy in general and of Latin American philosophy in particular. The three most common

approaches to the first topic are the universalist, the culturalist, and the critical, to which I add a fourth, the ethnic, that I have recently proposed.

Universalists such as Risieri Frondizi view philosophy as a universal discipline and not different from science (Frondizi, 1949). Philosophy, like mathematics or physics, has an object that it studies and a method it employs in doing so. But neither the effectiveness of the method nor the truth value of the conclusions it reaches depend on particular circumstances or perspectives. Either material objects are composed of matter and form or they are not, and so Aristotelian hylomorphism is either true or false. The question of whether there is a Latin American philosophy, then, depends on whether Latin Americans have been able to produce the kind of universal discipline that one expects when one has science as a model. Its problems are common to all humans, its method is also common, and its conclusions are supposed to be true, regardless of particular circumstances. Just as water is composed of a certain proportion of hydrogen and oxygen, so there are certain conditions that determine the identity of an artifact over time. Most universalists see Latin American philosophy as largely a failure in this respect.

Culturalists like Leopoldo Zea think, on the contrary, that truth is always perspectival, dependent on a point of view and that the method to acquire it is always contingent on a cultural context (Zea, 2004). Philosophy is a historical, non-scientific enterprise concerned with the elaboration of a general point of view from a certain personal or cultural perspective. But is there a Latin American philosophy? Why not, culturalists ask? If Latin Americans have engaged in developing views from their perspective as individuals or as Latin Americans, and using whatever means they have found appropriate to do so, there cannot but be a Latin American philosophy.

A third critical approach, articulated by Augusto Salazar Bondy and other critics, considers philosophy a result of social conditions and closely related to those conditions (Salazar Bondy, 1969). Some conditions are conducive to the production of philosophy, or what is sometimes called authentic philosophy, whereas others are not. So, is there a Latin American philosophy? For most critics the conditions operative in the area preclude the development of philosophy, because all the philosophy developed by Latin Americans is inauthentic and therefore not true philosophy. The dependence of Latin America on ideas imported from elsewhere, or its situation as dominated, prevents it from being authentic; it is a borrowed, subservient philosophy.

The second topic that has dominated discussions of Latin American philosophy by Latin Americans is concerned with the kind of philosophy that is practiced by Latin Americans. One is the philosophy developed in the academy, similar to what the scholastics developed in schools. It is a result of school activities and developed for academic purposes, the solution to puzzles of interest primarily to academics. The other is the philosophy developed outside the academy, and this responds to the needs and conditions under which it is developed. Its mode of expression is not academic, so it is frequently literary or polemical, and its concerns are not scholarly but real problems and issues confronted by Latin Americans.

Often culturalists and critical philosophers accuse universalists of being academic philosophers, and therefore of not being authentic or responsive to the practical and social needs of Latin Americans. Universalists respond by accusing culturalists and critical philosophers of not doing philosophy at all, but rather of developing the kind of personal or cultural narrative that has no scientific or universal value.

It should be obvious that these positions beg the question insofar as they begin with pre-established conceptions of philosophy that de-legitimize others. The issue, then, does not have to do with Latin American philosophy as such, but with the nature of philosophy. It should also be clear that the answer given to the questions we have asked is not descriptive but prescriptive: We are normatively told what is or is not Latin American philosophy, and therefore how we should think about it, and deal with it, in the classroom and as historiographers.

So far little headway has been made when it comes to answering the question we have raised concerning the identity of Latin American philosophy in a way that does not beg the question or even is useful for understanding the issues involved. Elsewhere, I have proposed a fourth approach that claims to avoid some of the problems that have resulted in an impasse (Gracia, 2007). This approach conceives Latin American philosophy as ethnic and serves to understand how Latin American philosophy is both different and similar to other philosophies, including scientific or universalist philosophy. It also helps us decide what to include in courses on Latin American philosophy and in its historiography.

An ethnic philosophy is the philosophy of an ethnos. This requires both the existence of the ethnos and a certain conception of philosophy by the ethnos. The ethnos, just as its philosophy, is not conceived in essentialist terms; there is no need for the ethnos or its philosophy to have a set of properties that are constant throughout their existence. Ethne are conceived in familial-historical terms; they are groups of people who have been brought together by history (Gracia, 2005). The model of a family is used as a metaphor to understand how an ethnic group can have unity without having all the members of the group necessarily share some first-order properties at any particular time in their history or throughout that history. Not all of them need have the same height, weight, eye color, degree of intelligence, customs, or even ancestry. Ethne are like families in that they originate and continue to exist as a result of historical events, such as marriage, but their members need not share common properties, although they may in certain circumstances do so, and certain ethnic groups require it. Indeed, some ethne require descent for membership, for example, a fact that has led some philosophers and anthropologists mistakenly to argue that descent is necessary for membership in all ethne, including the Latino/Hispanic ethnos (Corlett, 2003). Particular ethnic groups have much to say about criteria of membership, but these criteria are not always the same for all ethne.

An ethnic conception of Latin American philosophy conceives it as the philosophy of the Latin American ethnos (Gracia, 2007). This means that, just as the ethnos that produces it, Latin American philosophy need not have essential characteristics that, first, are shared by everything considered to be part of Latin American philosophy and, second, separate it from all other philosophies. It is only necessary that Latin American philosophy be whatever the historical circumstances that originated it and the ethnos that produced it made it. Because the unity of Latin American philosophy is historical and contextual, it becomes easier to account for its variety and for the inclusion in it of texts and figures that traditional Western philosophy might not consider philosophical, such as the *Popol Vuh* or the poems of Sor Juana. The criteria for inclusion are historical and contextual, and open to change and development.

History of the Controversy

Apart from the general characterization of the four approaches discussed, an understanding of Latin American philosophy can profit from an account of the historical development of the controversy in Latin America.

Explicit questions about a Latin American philosophy were first explored in the writings of Leopoldo Zea (1912–2004) and Risieri Frondizi (1910–83) in the 1940s. The growth of philosophical literature until then seemed to justify, and perhaps even require, an investigation of the nature, themes, and limits of this philosophical activity. The character and future of Latin American philosophy had been addressed before Zea and Frondizi explicitly raised the question of the identity of Latin American philosophy. The first author to do so was the Argentine Juan Bautista Alberdi (1810–84). He developed his ideas under the influence of a liberalism closely allied with philosophical rationalism, anticlericalism, and optimism about industrialization that was so characteristic of nineteenth-century Latin America (Alberdi, 1895–1901).

According to Alberdi, Latin American philosophy must have a social and political character intimately related to the most vital needs of the region. Philosophy is an instrument that can help introduce an awareness about the social, political, and economic needs of Latin American nations. This is why Alberdi categorically rejected metaphysics and other "pure and abstract" philosophical fields, which he viewed as alien to urgent national needs.

Followers of the universalist perspective, many of whom view metaphysics as the highest expression of philosophical thought, have questioned the validity of the Alberdian postulates, suggesting that they are merely politico-practical and therefore alien to philosophy. Those who adopt the culturalist approach, on the contrary, have seen in Alberdi the founding father of Latin American philosophy, owing to his insistence in the adjustment of philosophical thought to the needs of the region. They argue that Alberdi laid out the basis for a genuinely Latin American philosophy. Both perspectives ignore the historical situation surrounding Alberdi's thought, and interpret Alberdi's work on the basis of their own conceptions of philosophy, without paying sufficient attention to either the objectives of this author or the context of his ideas.

Alberdi's views coincide with the basic tenets of positivism, the most popular school of thought in Latin America in the second half of the nineteenth century. Positivism advocates the development of science and technology, rejects religion and metaphysics, and sees the native population as responsible for the economic backwardness of Latin America. While fighting to introduce the teaching of science in the system of education, and defending the industrialization of the region, positivism also produced a series of racial theories which attempted to explain the "inferiority" of the native population. The reasons for this emphasis on race are intimately connected with the identification, common at the time, of technology and the Anglo-Saxon race. To many positivists, and also to many liberals, the great obstacle to the industrialization of Latin America came from the predominantly Latin and native populations of the area, and their alleged resistance to technological development.

The positivist model for social and economic development received one of its first attacks from José Enrique Rodó (1871–1917). This Uruguayan thinker understood the distinction between technology and culture in terms of the Ariel–Caliban distinction made

popular by the French philosopher Renan, who had borrowed it from Shakespeare's play *The Tempest*, and used it as an instrument for social analysis (Rodó, 1988). Rodó represented a reversal of the Alberdian optimism with respect to industrialization, although he legitimized this phenomenon as a genuine concern for Latin American philosophers. According to him, technology not only embodies the gross features of Caliban, but it also represents the utilitarian democracy of the United States.

Whereas Alberdi viewed the elimination of the backward features of Latin American culture by means of industrialization and technological development positively, Rodó was strongly opposed to them, favoring instead the very culture rejected by Alberdi. Rodó underlined the positive features of the race, which he viewed rather romantically, and ascribed to it a spirituality capable of effectively opposing the utilitarian character of the industrial phenomena introduced by Anglo Saxons. Rodó's rejection of industrialization and its cultural implications, however, did not lead him to defend, or identify himself with, the Latin American native population.

This defense and identification, however, is central in the work of the Mexican philosopher José Vasconcelos (1882–1959). He adopted many of Rodó's views, but especially the dichotomies of technology–culture, Latin–Saxon, and foreign–autochthonous, turning them into the very core of the question of Latin American cultural identity (Vasconcelos, 1997). A proponent of a racial and cultural Pan-Americanism, Vasconcelos was confident that the region would find a cultural unity based on the amalgamation of its racial variety. The synthesis of the different cultures and races of Latin America provides, for this author, the very basis of the region's cultural identity, a feature which he opposes to the Anglo-Saxon spirit embodied by the British and North Americans alike. In fact, Vasconcelos believed this latter spirit to be limited to the white race and he argued that the Latin American race, because of its higher spirituality and richness, could successfully confront the narrow Anglo-Saxon spirit and its brainchild, technology.

Vasconcelos interpreted the Latin/Anglo-Saxon conflict as "a conflict between institutions, purposes, and ideals." A critical point of this conflict is the white Anglo-Saxon's attempt to "mechanize the world," whereas the Latin strives to integrate the components and virtues of all existing races into the one synthesis which Vasconcelos called the "cosmic race." This race will be the agent for the creation of the highest possible level humanity can attain: a spiritual-aesthetic stage where technology plays only a subordinate role (Vasconcelos, 1997).

Vasconcelos' emphasis on the cultural peculiarities of different ethnic groups attracted the attention of many intellectuals during the first half of the twentieth century, especially in Mexico, where the revolution was seeking to vindicate socially, economically, and culturally the native segment of the population. Not only did art and literature begin to concern themselves with the racial component of the region, but also philosophy and the essay of ideas in general.

Samuel Ramos (1897–1959), an associate of Vasconcelos at the Ministry of Education in Mexico, was perhaps the leading figure among the intellectuals who were inspired by Vasconcelos' thought. Like Vasconcelos, Ramos rejected the positivism of prerevolutionary Mexico, though not as much in spiritual and aesthetic terms as in humanistic ones. He pointed out that the conspicuous lack of humanism in Latin American thought was due to a large extent to the legacy of positivism (Ramos,

1962). The growth of this humanism, which he believed to be an essential component of any genuine Latin American thought, was impeded by "the universal invasion of machine civilization," by which he meant industrialization. In this way, Ramos contrasted humanism, which he viewed as the vehicle for the liberation of Latin Americans, with the pervasive technology which was beginning to characterize modern civilization. Mechanistic civilization, according to him, rather than helping human development, constitutes a "heavy burden" which threatens to "denaturalize" humanity.

Samuel Ramos inaugurated a new trend which emphasized autochthonous and national characteristics as the basis for philosophical activity. In contrast with Vasconcelos, who understood cultural identity in Latin American terms, Ramos placed emphasis on the national level, and only by inference, on Latin America in general. The study of *lo mexicano* (the properly Mexican) acquired full expression with Ramos, providing the basis for a culturalist view of philosophy. Students of Ramos's thought, however, have understood *lo mexicano* in more optimistic terms than those envisioned by Ramos himself. Ramos's view that an "inferiority complex" constitutes the fundamental feature of the Mexican character, and his skepticism concerning the integration of marginal segments of the Mexican population into the mainstream of Mexican society, are far from expressing an unqualified optimism with respect to *lo mexicano*.

The Chilean Félix Schwartzmann (b. 1913) understood the cultural impact of industrial development as a phenomenon which is not restricted to Latin America, but which affects the entire planet. Contrary to the positions taken by his predecessors, for Schwartzmann this phenomenon constitutes a cultural reality of its own and he suggested that the reaction against modernity and technology provides some of the most distinctive features which constitute the cultural identity of the region (Schwartzmann, 1950). The loneliness, impotence of self-expression, and search for genuine human bonds are some of the traits which Schwartzmann viewed as Latin American responses against the universal phenomenon of modernity, whose main feature is impersonalism. In search for these peculiar traits, Schwartzmann analyzed literature, poetry, and essays of ideas in the region, and found that both autochthonous and universal traits combine to produce a unique cultural expression which he called "the sentiment of the human in America."

The decade of the 1940s was a period in which intellectuals looked back on Latin American culture and attempted to use it as the basis of philosophical thinking. A generation of Mexican authors inspired by José Ortega y Gasset's perspectivism, introduced in Latin America by the *transterrados*, or Spanish exiles, and particularly by José Gaos, suggested that the cultural "circumstances" of the region provided the basis for the development of an original philosophy (Gaos, 1952). Leopoldo Zea, the leader of these intellectuals, claimed that any type of philosophical reflection emerging in the region could be classified as Latin-American philosophy by virtue of the intimate relationship between philosophy and culture. He also suggested that this philosophy had a historical foundation, owing to the fact that Latin Americans had always, in Zea's judgment, thought of their situation from a vital perspective. In this sense, even philosophical reflection lacking originality, resulting from mere imitation, could qualify as Latin American philosophy by virtue of its historicity and of the fact that it emerged in response to particular vital circumstances (Zea, 2004).

The nationalistic sentiment that characterized the politics of most Latin American nations at the time, but particularly Mexico, helped to promote Zea's views concerning the existence and nature of Latin American philosophy. Advocates and detractors of his conception made their voices heard quite quickly throughout the region. For Frondizi, who opposed Zea, philosophy must be distinguished from cultural nationalism and should be considered independent from geographical boundaries. One should speak of philosophy *in* America rather than of a philosophy *of* America (Frondizi, 1949). Philosophy, as Francisco Romero had pointed out earlier, has no last names; that is, it must be understood as a discipline with universal characteristics.

Vasconcelos himself, whose work in many ways reflected a culturalist perspective, adopted a universalist position when discussing the nature of philosophical activity. He went so far as to deny explicitly the existence of a peculiarly Latin American philosophy on the grounds that the discipline was universal in character, although he conceded that it was the prerogative of each culture to reconsider the great themes of universal philosophy (Vasconcelos, 1958). Philosophical nationalism had no place in his thought.

The polemic that suddenly surrounded the question of the existence of a Latin American philosophy in the '40s had the effect, in many cases, of undermining the focus on cultural identity that had characterized Latin American philosophical thought prior to the dispute, and which in many respects had prompted it. The controversy set a precedent for discussions of culture that became increasingly separated from the actual analysis of Latin American cultural phenomena. The culturalists themselves, who based their conceptions on a cultural perspective, have left few detailed accounts of the region's cultural ethos, and frequently refer to culture in very general terms.

Eduardo Nicol (1907–90), one of the members of the generation of *transterrados* to settle in Latin America during the Spanish Civil War, was among the first to return to the search for an ethos that would define Latin American culture. He proposed the notion of *hispanidad* as the core of both Spanish and Latin American cultural identity (Nicol, 1961). This concept, according to Nicol, unites linguistic and cultural aspects in both geographical areas, giving a distinctive character to these regions. Still, he did not see these regions as separated from the rest of the world. In a complete turnabout from the pessimism with which many intellectuals before him had viewed technological development, Nicol suggested that whatever unity the world has is due to science and technology. Technology provides an opportunity for world integration, which both Orteguean perspectivism and existentialism, products of a culture of crisis, are unable to muster. These philosophies, according to Nicol, supply a rationale for cultural regionalism and separatism in the midst of a world increasingly unified by science and technology.

Nicol's attack against one of the byproducts of cultural regionalism, namely, *indigenismo*, led him to justify and even minimize the politically sensitive question of the effects of Spanish colonization in Latin America. Echoing themes already sounded by Alberdi, he charged this movement with presenting an obstacle to the economic and technological integration of the region. Followers of this movement feel threatened, he suggested, by the integrating might of science and technology, which cannot but produce a "mutation" or upsetting of the "vital foundations" prevalent in Latin America. But Nicol did not see anything negative in this process. On the contrary, he saw it as

a positive step leading to a "meditation on one's own being" which will ultimately help establish a cultural ethos based on *hispanidad*. This, in turn, should produce a positive attitude in relation to technology and a subsequent end to the economic backwardness of the region.

Phenomenological views of a Heideggerian variety represented in Latin America by Ernesto Mayz Vallenilla (b. 1925) have also been used in the philosophical analysis of the continent's cultural identity. According to Mayz Vallenilla, Latin American culture is historically based on "the Latin American man's expectation to become" (Mayz Vallenilla, 1959). This expectation provides a peculiar state of consciousness which defines the most fundamental nature of human beings in the region. Mayz Vallenilla's definition represents an attempt to understand culture in ontological terms, an attempt which exempts him from examining in detail literary, artistic, and social expressions. In a subsequent work, *Latinoamérica en la encrucijada de la técnica* (Latin America at the crossroads of technology) (1976), however, he picked up the thread which explicitly relates technology and culture, suggesting that technology, which has among its outstanding features certain tendencies toward fostering "anonymity" and "homogeneity," is bent on destroying a Latin American ethos based on peculiarity, originality, and an "expectation" about the future. Consequently, he understands the confrontation between the Latin American cultural ethos and technology as a true "challenge."

None of the different interpretations of the cultural identity of Latin America have become established, a fact which should not surprise us. For neither the "inferiority complex" in terms of which Ramos used to refer to the Mexican character, nor the "cosmic race" of Vasconcelos, nor a particular sense of the human proposed by Schwartzmann, nor the *hispanidad* of Nicol, nor the "expectation" of Mayz Vallenilla, are susceptible to ultimate verification. The lack of consensus about the notion of Latin American culture extends also to the notion of philosophy. This is the reason why during the 1960s a number of authors readdressed this problem, although this time not in terms of either universalism or culturalism. It was at this time that the critical position discussed earlier arose. Augusto Salazar Bondy (1926–74), for instance, viewed philosophy in Latin America as the province of intellectual elites. These elites have borrowed European cultural forms uncritically, lacking an identifiable and rigorous methodology and an awareness of the situation of other social groups. Viewed in this light, the problems of culture and philosophy have been problems for only a small minority of intellectuals alienated from the rest of society, and from economic, social, and political problems (Salazar Bondy, 1969). This position, which has also been shared by Juan Rivano (b. 1926) among others, suggests that the history of the controversy concerning the existence and nature of Latin American philosophy epitomizes a lack of concern among intellectuals with the most urgent problems of their respective communities (Rivano, 1965).

Universalists reacted quickly to this new philosophical challenge. Among them was Fernando Salmerón (1925–97), who, in spite of having developed "culturalist" themes at the beginning of his philosophical career, in subsequent years rejected both the culturalist and the critical postures. According to him, two different conceptions of philosophy must be distinguished. The first conceives it as "wisdom or a conception of the world that, strictly speaking, is nothing but the expression of a moral attitude" (Salmerón, 1969). In this sense, it is possible to adopt a position like that of Salazar

Bondy, for example. But the word 'philosophy' is also understood more strictly "to refer to a determinate intellectual enterprise, analytic and theoretical, which, guided by an appropriately scientific energy, confronts problems of various types – for example, logical, epistemic, semantic – making use of certain methods about which there is general agreement." If philosophy is understood in this way, neither the culturalist nor the critical positions make sense.

Another dimension of the controversy surrounding Latin American philosophy has been the attempt to understand and locate it in historical terms, as well as to study its origins, limits, and themes. Francisco Miró Quesada (b. 1918) is among the most important thinkers who have propounded this type of study. He has analyzed the causes, results, and future of, and the views proposed on, this issue. The situation which originated this controversy, according to him, is a so-called "sense of disorientation." The effort to overcome this disorientation, he suggests, "is the key for understanding Latin American philosophical activity" (Miró Quesada, 1976). His concern is not with the question of whether there is, or can be, a Latin American philosophy, but rather with the study of the preoccupation for the topic and its future.

The controversy has continued to grow and attract much attention among members of practically every philosophical tradition, with the exception of philosophical analysis. Existentialists, phenomenologists, Thomists, Kantians, and Ortegueans have felt compelled to explore this issue. But since none of the different interpretations of the cultural identity of Latin America has become widely accepted, it has been impossible in turn to establish a consensus on the notion of Latin American philosophy.

It is in this milieu that the movement known as "the philosophy of liberation" appeared in the 1970s. For philosophers like Enrique Dussel (b. 1934), Horacio Cerutti Guldberg (b. 1950), and Arturo Andrés Roig (b. 1922), the fundamental task of philosophy in Latin America consists in the social and national liberation from the unjust relations such as that of dominating–dominated that have traditionally characterized Latin America. For Roig in particular, this implies an integration of the Latin American peoples based on the consciousness of the historicity of the American man and of the history of philosophy in Latin America. His position rejects the formalism and ontologism characteristic of traditional academic philosophy, favoring instead a philosophy of commitment that seeks integrating concepts in Latin America (Roig, 2004). The novelty of this philosophy will be founded in the political discourse of the marginal and exploited segments of society, developing an authentic thought that may serve to give rise to "man's humanity."

Conclusion

The discussion of the identity of Latin American philosophy has been intense and since the nineteenth century it has become one of the most common topics of discussion in Latin American philosophy. But even before the nineteenth century, Latin American intellectuals were concerned with issues of identity that apply beyond philosophy, to the peoples of Latin America themselves. The concern with identity reveals much about Latin Americans and what they think about themselves and their place in the world. But it also serves to tie Latin American thought to that of other peoples who have been

or have become preoccupied with matters of identity, including various ethnic groups all over the world, and in particular, of Latinos/Hispanics in the United States.

Related chapters: 3 Colonial Thought; 5 Early Critics of Positivism; 9 'Normal' Philosophy; 10 Ortega y Gasset's Heritage in Latin America; 13 Liberation Philosophy; 19 Latinos on Race and Ethnicity: Alcoff, Corlett, and Gracia; 20 *Mestizaje* and Hispanic Identity; 24 Latin American Philosophy.

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