

## What is characteristic of Latin American philosophy?

Susana Nuccetelli, Ofelia Schutte, and Otávio Bueno (eds):  
**A companion to Latin American philosophy. Malden,  
MA, etc.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010. XIV + 555 pp, £100.00 HB**

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This volume contains the most extensive exposition of Latin American philosophy to date. I know of no other comparable anthology on the subject in any language. The width of its scope is quite impressive. At least for this reason, and whatever its shortcomings might be (to some of them I'll come to speak below), it is a welcome collective work.

Forty-two scholars from the United States and some Latin American countries have contributed to it. About two-thirds of them have positions in US-American academic institutions; of the remaining set, ten are Argentines, two work in Brazil, two in Mexico, and one in Spain. There are no contributors from other Latin American countries with a non-negligible philosophical tradition, such as Chile, Colombia, Peru, Uruguay, or Venezuela. This imbalance will presumably provoke a certain malaise in those readers who (like me) fulfil the condition of being Latin Americans but who neither work in the United States nor are Argentines. (By way of comparison, imagine a companion to Anglo-Saxon philosophy, two-thirds of whose contributors work in Latin America, and the rest are mostly Australians: This could be an interesting editorial experiment, but it would nevertheless look somewhat awkward to many people).

The *Companion* consists of an Introduction by the editors and four main parts: (I) "Historical Perspectives", (II) "Current Issues", (III) "Disciplinary Developments", and (IV) "Biographical Sketches". While the rationale for distinguishing a historical part from the rest is clear, the distinction between the parts "Current Issues" and "Disciplinary Developments" is less easy to grasp. Indeed, there is a lot of overlapping between these two parts.

For lack of space, it is impossible in this review even briefly to comment on each of the thirty-six chapters the book contains, though most of them deserve attentive

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reading. Therefore, after providing a short summary of the contents of the four parts, I'll comment a bit more extensively on two topics I assume might be of special interest to the readers of *Metascience*: (1) the general metaphilosophical question of the meaning of the term 'Latin American philosophy' and (2) logic and philosophy of science in Latin America.

Part I lays out the development of Latin American philosophy from pre-Columbian times until present. Special attention is given to Nahuatl metaphysics and philosophy of life (strangely enough, Maya cosmogony is almost ignored), the dominance of scholastics during the colonial period (though the 'heterodox' Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz and Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora are also duly considered), the tremendous impact positivism had on Latin American intellectuals during the 19th century (though on the practical-political level rather than on theoretical thought), the anti-positivistic turn mainly in the context of the Mexican Revolution of 1910 (Antonio Caso and José Vasconcelos), and the professionalization of philosophy in many Latin American countries mainly due to Spanish exiles (among them, José Gaos and Eduardo Nicol in Mexico, David Garcia Bacca in Venezuela, and José Ferrater Mora *from* the United States). For the 20th century, phenomenology, Marxism, liberation philosophy, and analytic philosophy are considered in detail. After the 1960s, analytic philosophy got well established in several institutions, such as the Mexican "Instituto de Investigaciones Filosóficas" (mainly through the efforts of Fernando Salmerón), the "Centro de Lógica, Epistemología e História da Ciência" in Campinas, Brazil (mainly through Oswaldo Porchat and Newton da Costa), and the "Sociedad de Análisis Filosófico" in Buenos Aires (Gregorio Klimovsky, Eduardo Rabossi and many others).

In Parts II and III, we find those topics and currents that have been most discussed in Latin America in the last 50 years or so. A prominent role is played by the issue of Latin American identity in general and of the alleged specificity of Latin American philosophy in particular. On the whole, at least eight chapters are devoted to this complex. Though the much debated question whether there is, or should be, a specific Latin American philosophy clearly should appear in any Companion to Latin American philosophy, I have more doubts about the pertinence of the broader issue of Latin American identity in a work of this nature. I certainly find some of the contributions to the latter issue quite interesting, but I wonder whether they would not have found a more appropriate place in an anthology devoted to ethnology, sociology, sociolinguistics, and related disciplines. Other chapters of these two parts deal with philosophical areas that have had a strong development in Latin America in the last decades: mathematical logic, the philosophy of science, ethics and philosophy of law, feminist philosophy, the relationship between philosophy and literature (which is particularly intense in Latin America, as the writings of Jorge Luis Borges and Octavio Paz, among others, eminently show), and metaphysics, especially of the analytical brand.

The much shorter Part IV has only two chapters. The first consists of biographical notices on "Some Great Figures" of Latin American philosophy. The selection of these 'great figures' seems somewhat arbitrary to me. For example, it includes such people as the Venezuelan Simón Bolívar or the Peruvian Víctor Haya de la Torre, undoubtedly great political figures, but whose *philosophical* significance may be

questioned. On the other hand, I miss the names of other scholars who have done much for the consolidation of philosophy in Latin America, such as the Argentines Carlos Alchourrón and Gregorio Klimovsky, the Brazilian Oswaldo Porchat, the Mexican Fernando Salmerón, or the Spanish-Mexican Eduardo Nicol, to mention just a few. The second chapter of this part is an autobiographical sketch by Mario Bunge. It is quite refreshing to read Bunge's vivid description of the almost quixotic fight for a scientifically oriented philosophy in the Argentina of the 1950s. But, again, one may wonder why the editors have not asked also other pioneers of these heroic times, such as Peruvian Francisco Miró Quesada, Chilean Roberto Torretti, or Mexican Luis Villoro, who also enjoy an international reputation, to write a similar report on their experiences.

Let me now make some more detailed comments on two topics that I find particularly relevant for *Metascience*: the meaning of the term 'Latin American philosophy' and the development of original Latin American approaches in logic and philosophy of science. The question about the most adequate explication of the concept of Latin American philosophy is the main thread running through the *Companion*, explicitly or implicitly. But the most systematic treatment of this issue is to be found in Susana's Nuccetelli's contribution (Chapter 24). There is a strong tension between understanding the label 'Latin American philosophy' simply as 'Philosophy done in Latin America (or by Latin American scholars)' and understanding it as 'Philosophy that is *specific*, or *distinctive*, of Latin America'. In the course of the development of philosophical thought in Latin America since the 19th century, two parties have confronted each other—sometimes quite angrily: on the one hand, the 'universalists', who contend that 'philosophy of country or region *X*' can only mean 'philosophy done in *X*', and the 'distinctivists' on the other hand, who claim that 'philosophy of *X*' means, or should mean, 'philosophy that is distinctive of *X*'—at least when '*X*' is instantiated by 'Latin America'. Nuccetelli dismisses a strong form of universalism because it simply does not reflect the reality of philosophy as developed by Latin American authors, namely the fact that much of it, though not all of it, is devoted to topics at least in part determined by socio-cultural issues that are specific of Latin America. On the other hand, she also dismisses strong distinctivism, which for the converse reasons seems to her as inadequate to the reality of Latin American philosophy as strong universalism. Consequently, she propounds an intermediate position which she calls 'weak universalism', and which she attributes also to Jorge J. E. Gracia (another main figure in the debate). I sympathize with Nuccetelli's moderate position, which seems to me to reflect best my own experience—though, surprisingly, she excludes me from the list of genuinely Latin American philosophers (see page 351 of her contribution). However, I would just add that there is still another possible way to interpret the label 'Latin American philosophy', viz. as philosophy that is concerned with topics of universal interest but that, for historically contingent reasons, has been developed in Latin America in a particularly intense and systematic way. At least three areas where this understanding of 'Latin American philosophy' seems adequate are logic, philosophy of law, and philosophy of science. And so I come to my next, and final, comment.

The construction of paraconsistent logic systems (see Chapter 15 by Newton da Costa and Otávio Bueno) is an original Latin American product. Initially suggested

by Peruvian Francisco Miró Quesada, it has been developed systematically over several decades by the Brazilian da Costa and his group. Another original Latin American product is formal deontic logic applied to legal systems as developed by the Argentines Carlos Alchourrón and Eugenio Bulygin (see Chapter 31 by Pablo Navarro). This product, in turn, was one of the bases for another original, partly Latin American approach: belief revision theory, especially the so-called *AGM*-model (“*AGM*” stands for “Alchourrón, Gärdenfors and Makinson”—see Chapter 34 by Horacio Arló-Costa and Eduardo Fermé). In the philosophy of science, Latin Americans have offered to the world a number of approaches that have partly been developed in Latin America; they comprise at least the following: Mario Bunge’s particular brand of scientific realism, Roberto Torretti’s historical approach to the foundations of physics, and the structuralist theory of science as developed by Ulises Moulines and his group (see Chapter 26 by Alberto Cordero). All the approaches mentioned here share the following features: (1) they are ‘universal’ in the sense that they use concepts and provide arguments that are intended to be universally valid; (2) they have been developed by Latin American authors; (3) they have been originally devised, at least partially, in some Latin American countries; and (4) they have found widespread interest both *in* and *outside* Latin America. To conclude, I would like to propose any philosophical development fulfilling conditions (1)–(4) as an instantiation of ‘Latin American philosophy’. This would be an understanding of Latin American philosophy that would be ‘universalist’ as much as ‘distinctivist’.