

## Latin American Philosophy at a Crossroads

Susana Nuccetelli, Ofelia Schutte, and Otávio Bueno (eds.):  
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### Overview

In recent years a cottage industry of secondary research in philosophy has emerged that aims to provide introductory yet detailed analyses of emerging trends in the discipline's various sub-fields. Rarely do we encounter an authoritative volume that serves as a comprehensive guide and a timely touchstone to the state of the discipline itself. Nuccetelli, Schutte, and Bueno's (eds.) *A Companion to Latin American Philosophy*, consisting of 36 previously unpublished entries written by forty-two of the field's leading scholars, performs such a task.

Here, for the first time, a wide-ranging and inclusive anthology of Latin American philosophy exists that makes original, in-depth overviews of seminal themes and ideas in the field available to the English-speaking world, watering an increasing scholarly interest in the field while also acknowledging the layered, meta-philosophical complexities involved in representing Latin American perspectives to English-speaking readers. This is especially visible in the pluralistic selection criteria for this volume. Each of the *Companion's* four major sections, "Historical Perspectives," "Current Issues," "Disciplinary Developments," and "Biographical Sketches," contain entries that in various ways—whether by contextualizing topics in the broader ambit of colonial history or directly reflecting upon the difficulties that have hereto plagued the field, such as the devaluation of Spanish as a philosophical language—produce a refreshingly diverse and panoptic view of Latin American philosophy.

Those unfamiliar with Latin American philosophy can expect a well-crafted and cohesive narrative that begins with pre-Columbian thought, courses through disciplinary developments and topics that include the 'normalizing' period of academic philosophy in Latin America, and ends with useful encyclopedic

references to major figures. Especially helpful is the clear sequencing of the major European and Iberophone intellectual traditions that influenced Latin American thought, most notably those of scholasticism, positivism, liberalism, Marxism and phenomenology. More veteran readers will enjoy the critical depth and exactitude of the volume's many entries, with some outstanding contributions in Andean philosophy, liberation philosophy, paraconsistent logic and feminist philosophy, to name just a few. While more prominent themes in the field—such as philosophical reflections on race and ethnicity—are given substantial attention, the editors have compiled a wide assortment of specialized topics that ensures multiple points of entry for a broad philosophical audience. These range from issues in contemporary ethics, political philosophy, logic and epistemology to the historical intersection of philosophy with Latin American literature—even topics in pedagogy and the status of the profession in Latin America.

Among the *Companion's* shortcomings are the significant overlap—perhaps unavoidable in a work of this magnitude—of explications of historical figures, the biographical inclusion of only those academic philosophers born prior to 1950, and the solitary placement of Mario Bunge's autobiographical essay at the close of part four. While the first of these can serve to strengthen a reader's knowledge of the field's history, the latter two risk producing an incomplete picture of the field by leaving out well-known figures like Linda Martín Alcoff (although her work is directly addressed in one entry), or by representing developments in the field through the voice and introspection of only one exemplar. To a large extent, the *Companion's* editors anticipate these shortcomings, arguing in favor of the volume's reception to be conceived in terms of ongoing contributions to the field rather than as an authoritative mouthpiece (6).

The publication of the *Companion* marks a significant milestone in Latin American philosophy; nothing quite like it exists to date. In producing a volume of such scope and magnitude, the editors have helped formalize and bring attention to a diverse body of thought whose very existence has been held in question for decades. In what follows, and as a way to introduce issues that I believe to be of general interest to *Human Studies* readers, I would like to provide insight into why Latin American philosophy has largely failed to gain the respect and attention historically bestowed upon its North-American counterparts, especially among the more mainstream philosophical communities throughout the English-speaking world. In so doing, I offer no definitive answers or arrive at technical definitions that clearly demarcate the conceptual borders of Latin American philosophy, as it is a dynamically unfolding and historically multifaceted field. Rather, I draw on the *Companion's* resources to form part of the ongoing attempts at critically engaging and dismantling the conceptual trajectories (and uninformed prejudices) responsible for the devaluation of Latin American philosophy as a merely imitative field that, with very few exceptions, relies on European, Anglo-American and Iberophone models of philosophy for its contributions. In this vein, the question of *authenticity*, whether there is in fact a 'distinct' or 'characteristically' Latin American philosophy that is marked by clear specificity and/or *original* approaches to established philosophic topics and practices, has been at the forefront of the debate for a variety of reasons—the most important of which, as I will argue, consists in the resilience

of neo-colonial and imperialist tendencies in mainstream, Anglophone philosophic practice.

### The Question of Authenticity

Historically, the question of authenticity can be traced, not to European philosophical currents, but to the critical introspection of nineteenth century Latin American intellectuals, who, in the wake of post-independence nation building, were faced with the problem of conceptualizing shifting cultural formations in ways unencumbered by European culture. To do this, methods of philosophical reflection were needed that could diagnose and properly discuss the social, economic, and political realities of the subcontinent. This was no easy task. As the Peruvian political philosopher, José Carlos Mariátegui (1844–1930) stated:

All the thinkers of our America have been educated in European schools. The spirit of the race is not felt in their work. The continent's intellectual production lacks its own characteristics. It does not have an original profile. Hispanic-American thought is generally only a rhapsody composed from the motifs and elements of European thought. To prove this, one can merely review the work of the highest representatives of the Indo-Iberian intellect (qtd. in Nuccetelli 2002: 525).

Mariátegui's focus was not on arguing for the non-existence of distinctive Latin American thought, but on diagnosing the conditions that, mirroring other underdeveloped sectors in Latin American society, have hereto impeded its development. To achieve the goals of national independence movements in the robust sense of political, economic, *and cultural* autonomy, Latin Americans would have to wrestle with the impact of European intellectual frameworks, as these were responsible for articulating the relationship between cultural identity and self-knowledge in the absence of recognizable, autochthonous cultural values (destroyed, in large part, by European colonialism). Latin American philosophy, under this rubric, must be concordant with the social and political particularities of the region; it must, as the Argentine thinker Juan Bautista Alberdi (1810–1884) first put it, “rise from our needs” (1842: 337).

In the twentieth century, following the institutionalization of academic philosophy through figures like Alejandro Korn (1860–1936), Samuel Ramos (1897–1959), José Gaos (1900–1969) and Leopoldo Zea (1912–2004), the question of authenticity was modified to reflect the guiding concerns of the time. In many ways, the intellectual movements that in the nineteenth century had spurred visionary reform and Pan-American optimism collapsed under the weight of political dictatorships, U.S. interventionist policies, sky-rocketing national debts and stunted development in the productive sectors of society. While the U.S. and Europe were gaining economic momentum in post-war periods, Latin America was becoming increasingly subordinate as a repository of natural resources and cheap labor: a Banana Republic for foreign corporate interests. By the 1930s, for instance, the U.S.-based United Fruit Company owned over three million acres of land in

Latin America and the Caribbean (including almost half the arable land in Guatemala by the 1950s), a vast portion of national transportation and communication infrastructures, and was the largest employer in Central America (Striffler and Moberg 2003). Thus, despite the growth of leftist reform movements in the 1950s and 1960s and national attempts to engineer economic progress through more bilateral trade policies (like those based on import-substitution industrialization), the growing asymmetry between North and South led many Latin American intellectuals to reconfigure the problem of authentic cultural and intellectual production in terms of ossified, *structural* (especially economic) dependency on Europe and the United States.

Structural dependency differs from cultural subordination insofar as in the former, cultural subordination has taken on orderly, consistent, and potentially rule-governed characteristics over a period of time. Given that, as Meri Clark notes, “the Catholic Church controlled the production and dissemination of knowledge in the colonies for centuries,” by the mid twentieth century, Latin America—now under the control of multinational capital and foreign government interests—appeared to be sedimented in a monolithic tradition of subordination often regarded as neocolonial or imperial (58).

It is in this light that the Peruvian philosopher Augusto Salazar Bondy (1925–1974), in his 1968 *¿Existe una filosofía de nuestra América?* (*Does a philosophy of our America exist?*) decreed, “the problem of our philosophy is inauthenticity” (69). For Salazar Bondy, “inauthenticity is rooted in our historical condition of being underdeveloped and dominated countries. Therefore, the development of our own philosophy is intimately tied to the surmounting of underdevelopment and domination” (69). On his view, if a puppet nation cannot properly develop its own political traditions, social and cultural institutions also risk operating as marionettes. In the absence of endemic alternatives, philosophy falls prey to mimicry and imitation of Euro-American forms, so that the question of whether a distinctly Latin American philosophy exists is *no* since the conditions necessary for its development as such have been systematically suppressed. If Latin American philosophy is to move forward, these constraints must first be acknowledged and addressed.

This theme of underdevelopment was adopted by many of Latin America’s leading intellectuals in the mid to late twentieth century. It can still be seen today in widespread and important claims that it is not possible (at least practically or effectively) to do philosophy without the resources of clean water, minimally adequate nutrition, basic medical care, pen and paper or the mental fortitude which, unburdened by the load of multiple work shifts or field work, could absorb itself in protracted exercises of conceptual analysis. (Nor could philosophy develop professionally as an inclusive field if material conditions exist that restrict the socio-economic mobility of women and marginalized sectors of society.) But this, of course, could be true of a number of regions, as extreme poverty, malnutrition and socio-economic barriers run rampant not just in the subcontinent or Africa but in rural Appalachia as well.

In Latin America, however, historically unique legacies of domination are operative in underdevelopment, often resulting in a particularly urgent moral

dimension to the question of authenticity: In rural Appalachia, one might not be able to pursue philosophy due to material and cultural restraints, but one does not expect to die from it either. Contributor David Ignatius Gandolfo, summarizing the rich tradition of Latin American liberation thought, recounts the well-known but often under-stressed periods of the region's history where this has not been the case. He reminds us of figures like Ignacio Ellacuría (1930–1989), then president of the Universidad Centroamericana (UCA) and chair of the philosophy department, who along with five colleagues was assassinated in 1989 by an elite military battalion of the U.S.-backed Salvadorian government (190).

Circumstances like these led Salazar Bondy, along with many thinkers of his generation, to conclude that philosophy ought to develop in accordance with rational principles that contribute to the elimination of oppression and cultural alienation as much as they do to the development of a specialized field based on rigorous forms of analysis. Thus, we see that up until this point, the question of authenticity—whether a characteristically distinct Latin American philosophy exists—was considered in the wider context of dismantling frameworks of colonial domination and imperialism. Rather than a factual question with a precise truth-value, it was the *formulation of a problem* propagated internally by Latin American thinkers themselves, so that it is not without irony, as J. M. Garrido notes, that “the very question about an original Latin American philosophy is already an originality of Latin American philosophy” (2007: 23).

Today, however, the question of authenticity bears little to no resemblance to its historical antecedents. Instead, it operates under the purview of disciplinary parameters that focus almost exclusively on stipulative definitions of what *philosophy* is or should be. Although steadily in effect for almost six decades now, this is a conceptual shift that has lost transparency in recent years, often resulting in the devaluation of broader issues in Latin American philosophy (such as those concerned with cultural identity) to fields traditionally seen as ‘outside’ philosophy, like cultural criticism, anthropology or ethnology. One of the main reasons this shift has lost transparency is that the two previous formulations of the authenticity question—the cultural subordination and structural dependency models—have been absorbed into the current approach as subsidiary elements (usually as factials and counterfactuals) to the question's *logical* form. This allows important references to socio-historical and material conditions (especially those that help one locate the conceptual borders of the field) to be made while simultaneously upholding abstract universals and the fulfillment of conditions for semantic truth as cornerstones of philosophic thinking.

For example, proponents of the field often point out as part of their arguments that the kinds of questions frequently asked of Latin American philosophy are not leveled against Euro-American philosophical traditions like American pragmatism or Ancient philosophy. There is no corresponding concern for the ‘authenticity’ of these traditions as they emerged as part of a larger historical continuum that derives from Ancient Greece. Because the relation of these traditions to their constituting legacy is largely *unproblematic*—as it was not the product of forceful, violent imposition and the simultaneous eradication of indigenous philosophical conventions—they do not show up as philosophically suspect.

Another frequent claim points to prevailing conditions of widespread inequality and underdevelopment that place philosophical production in the subcontinent on unequal footing with its North American and European counterparts. Related to this claim is the perceived asymmetry and lack of dialogue between Latin American and foreign philosophers, who, as Guillermo Hurtado notes, “visit our countries to deliver talks, [but] very rarely quote us in their work” (2006: 204).

Lastly, rather than take up the logical form of the question that informs and delimits the nature of what can count as a response, many respond to the authenticity question by arguing in favor of the existence of Latin American philosophy on the basis of clear evidence of a long-standing tradition of critically engaging a coherent and consistent set of themes—such as those that reflect on the identity of culture, race, and ethnicity following European colonization of Mesoamerica and the Andes. Because many of us tend to concur with these individual claims, over time the situated set of circumstances that imparted the logical form of the authenticity question with its initial import has lost salience; instead, the practice of philosophic thinking as executed through a particular kind of methodology—one that is based on the synchronic formulation of logical truths—has prevailed. This produces the misleading effect that culturally-situated thinking is guiding or robustly informing critical analyses of topics that, as we will see later, cannot be fully severed from the unique set of social and historical circumstances from which they arose, as they are still being affected by legacies of domination and cultural imperialism.

In fact today, an interested reader exploring the topic of Latin American philosophy can expect to first encounter a myriad of preliminary distinctions aimed at disambiguating the technical meaning of foundational terminology—as in what counts, should, could, or does not count as Latin American philosophy. This, of course, is not a bad thing in itself, except that in most cases a particular conception of meaning is already at play that filters out alternative possibilities for critically engaging some of the broader nuances of the field, particularly in the realm of colonial history and its impact on racialized lived experience. This conception is usually of meaning as an independent, formalizable structure that is separate from the context(s) in which it is articulated and expressed.

Take, for example, the starting point of much modern-day discussion on the subject: whether there is such a thing as Latin American philosophy and, whether there is or there isn't, stipulating the conditions for determining what counts as such. When deployed under the rubric of mainstream Anglo-American philosophy, generally implicit will be the view that philosophy concerns itself with (a) problems that are of *universal* interest and value insofar as they are recognizably ‘philosophical’ in nature (such as questions about the ultimate nature of reality or truth), (b) the production of *original* arguments or, as a corollary, a body of arguments that constitute *distinctive* approaches to these problems (as in the Kyoto School of philosophy) and (c) the utilization of a logical system of argumentative reasoning that allows for the clear identification of positions and rigorous examination of claims. ‘*Latin American*’ thus becomes a grammatical modifier to the principal noun, ‘philosophy,’ and as such questions about its identifiable

characteristics or existence are examined from the perspective of the prevailing norms of the latter.

With this formulation of philosophy at the helm of mainstream disciplinary practice, especially in the U.S., the range of conceptual entry points into the authenticity debate—even the range of methods of analysis used to engage the question—becomes restricted. At best, efforts are made to disentangle universalist views about philosophical production into ‘strong’ or ‘weak’ versions (or differentiate it altogether from ‘non-universalist’ and historicist approaches) so as to accommodate culturally specific differences in Latin American thought while also satisfying conditions for inclusion as ‘philosophy’. This is not because alternatives do not exist or because Latin American philosophers have a false consciousness about the methods they rely on to advance philosophic arguments—they do not. Many uphold these as the genuine and correct ways of engaging the debate. In fact, over the last few decades they have played an important role in raising the profile of the field (or even to constitute it as such) in professional academic circles throughout the English-speaking world.

But as is often the case with asymmetrical conditions of exchange between historically dominant and peripheral cultures, much of the conceptual labor consistently falls on members of the subordinate culture; the burden is on Latin American philosophers and proponents of the field, not to merely provide *justifications* for their arguments, but to first *recode* terms and ideas familiar to them through the conceptual orthodoxies the interlocutor’s culture has already established as ‘universal’. Consider Gandolfo’s remark about the existence of a genuine philosophical tradition in Latin American liberation thought, also known as the philosophy of liberation:

Philosophical questions concerning liberation involve ontological inquiries about the nature of being human, ethical inquiries about valuation, and sociopolitical questions about what would constitute a more just, humane, and humanizing society. *The result of pressing forward on these inquiries* has been the *original contribution to philosophy* known as Latin American liberation philosophy (186, my emphasis).

From yet another perspective, contributor James Maffie outlines the philosophical contributions of pre-Columbian thinkers, arguing that

Pre-Columbian societies contained individuals who reflected critically and systematically upon the nature of reality, human existence, knowledge, right conduct, and goodness; individuals who puzzled over questions like ‘How should humans act,’ and ‘What can humans know, and ‘What can humans hope for?’ (9).

The point here is not to ascribe a particular conceptual approach to these authors but to merely point out a general tendency to engage topics in Latin American philosophy by first triangulating back to prior notions of what mainstream philosophical communities already recognize as incontrovertible philosophy. One advantage to this approach is that, by making claims that can be widely understood by others in the mainstream, the philosophical perspectives of the subordinate

culture can be heard and legitimated by established philosophic circles, thereby helping to create possible lines of dialogue for building philosophical communities based on mutual learning and exchange. On the down side, one risks subordination through constant triangulation between the question of authenticity's disciplinary formulation and prior notions of philosophy that, in large part, are responsible for delimiting the current parameters of the question itself.

While there are many complex factors at play, generally speaking, this last turn in the authenticity question (i.e., its logical formulation) can be traced back to key changes in the professionalization of philosophy as a *technical* discipline and the rise of Anglo-American philosophy in Latin America during the 1940s and 1950s—especially those strands that uphold ahistorical, apolitical and scientific views of the discipline. Delving into this background will help to further situate the resilience of universalizing and imperial tendencies that so often play a determining role in the reception of Latin American philosophy today.

### **Analytic Philosophy and the Reception of Latin American Philosophy**

Although the first Spanish-language book on Anglo-Saxon thought was published in 1922 by the Harvard-trained Peruvian philosopher, Pedro Zulen (1885–1925), it was an isolated contribution at a time when keystones of the early Anglo-Analytic tradition were largely unknown or had not yet been translated (Pérez and Oritz-Millán, 208). Prior to the introduction of the first Spanish translations of Anglo-Analytic texts in countries like Mexico, Brazil, Argentina and Peru in the 1940s and 1950s, it was the German existential and phenomenological tradition—particularly the work of Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger—that carried the most salience in Latin American academies. This was largely due to the influence of Spanish exiles, such as José Gaos, who sought refuge in Latin American universities during the Civil War of 1936–1939. Gaos, who made the first Spanish translation of Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit*, helped disseminate the work of German phenomenologists along with that of his teacher, José Ortega Y Gasset (1883–1955)—a figure who profoundly shaped the intellectual culture of Latin America in the first half of the twentieth century.

Deeply entrenched in the intellectual scene through figures like Carlos Astrada (1894–1970) and Alberto Wagner de Reyna (1915–2006) (both of whom studied under Heidegger in Freiburg), these philosophical traditions were originally “heralded as a new attempt to break away from colonialist traditional conceptions of philosophizing” associated with neo-Thomism (De Olivera 2010: 156). And, though they never fully dissipated following the Cold War period, in light of the region's changing historical circumstances these traditions would come to face serious challenges from methods of analysis that could be seen as offering more rigorous and systematic tools for understanding practical and philosophic concerns.

From the institutional standpoint, the fate of phenomenology in Latin America coincided with the rise of authoritarian military governments (largely installed by foreign interests) to combat the spread of communism in the region. This had two effects. First, it sent into exile many of the leading phenomenologists of the interwar

period. Second, it left intact those elements of phenomenology which favored right-wing readings of Heidegger and Husserl, thus fostering what Nythmar De Olivera calls an “unholy alliance” between phenomenology and conservative thought in Latin America (162–163). While the “French, politicized, existential versions of phenomenology and structuralism” received significant attention in revolutionary socialist Cuba, in places like Chile and Argentina, the opposite strain flourished (162–163). With left-wing existentialists in exile, there were few intellectual counter-measures to take. Even the efforts of the Chilean historian and philosopher Victor Farías (another of Heidegger’s Freiburg students), who later published an influential criticism of Heidegger’s Nazism (Farías 1987) while abroad, failed to neutralize the lasting impact of this period on the development of Latin American philosophy as phenomenology, which is that it “failed to constitute any important legacy for the next generation of thinkers” (163).

Enter analytic philosophy. In Latin America, the first professional academic journal in philosophy, *Minerva* (1944), was established by the Argentine theoretical physicist and philosopher of science, Mario Bunge (1919–) following the 1943 military coup d’état in Argentina. As he recounts, “*Minerva* was born in 1944, with a combative editorial where I held that the war against fascism involved the philosophical fight against irrationalism, in particular the astradas and gentas (in lower case) in our milieu” (530). Bunge is referring to the prominent existentialists Carlos Astrada and Jordán Genta (1909–1974), both of whom benefited professionally from the new regime as party faithfuls (although Genta was the more conservative of the two). Bunge explains how “under authoritarian regimes university professors, particularly in the humanities, were expected to toe the party line. In Argentina this meant teaching either irrationalist pseudo-philosophy [existentialism] or dogmatic Thomism” (530). The association of prevailing philosophic currents with dogmatic thinking, along with the exilic silence of left-wing phenomenologists, created an intellectual opening where analytic philosophy—through its clear presentation of arguments, technical standards of proof based on formal principles, and aims for the emancipation of the intellect through reason—could blossom.

Contributors Diana Pérez and Gustavo Ortiz-Millán provide insight into other conditions under which analytic philosophy took root in Latin America, noting that it was not professional philosophers but scientists and lawyers with general interests in scientific foundations or the philosophy of law who first turned their attention to the field (199). Despite this initial point of entry, “little by little, lawyers, scientists, and philosophers alike came under the influence of analytic philosophy: they saw this new philosophy as a tool for opposing some of the theories that were in vogue at the time, improving the arguments proposed to defend their ideas, and the conceptual precision used to present their positions” (199). Thus, slowly, analytic philosophy gained popularity as a way to confront methods of philosophical reflection (such as existentialism) that did not seem to provide one with clear and consistent theoretical approaches to problems.

At a time when political instability, social violence and economic discontinuity plagued the majority of Latin American nations, rubrics based on the clarification of terms and the pursuit of logical truth through valid arguments allowed a number of

philosophers to interrogate key concerns through the stabilizing gaze of scientific precision. The intellectual transformation of Luis Villoro (1922–) is one such case. “Villoro, who by the 1960s had already published a number of books on Descartes, Husserl, and Mexican history, started turning his attention towards analytic epistemology,” eventually regarding his epistemological work “as a way of getting into his interests in political philosophy, specially ‘the relationship between thinking and forms of domination’” (204–205). Like Villoro, the work of Peruvian philosopher (and Minister of Education in the 1960s) Francisco Miró Quesada (1918–) was also in agreement with the emancipatory goals of post-independence Latin American political thought, albeit from the perspective of analytic philosophy. Trained in continental philosophy, in his 1963, *Apuntes para una teoría de la razón* (*Notes for a theory of reason*), Miró Quesada developed a conception of historical reason that could “investigate ideological and ethical issues within a valid formal logical and mathematical framework” (Gilson and Pappas 2010: 514).

Thus, we see that by time Salazar Bondy—Miró Quesada’s student—writes *¿Existe una filosofía de nuestra América?* (*Does a philosophy of our America exist?*) in 1968, analytic philosophy had already gained significant ground in Latin America. This then helps explain the existence of an early version of the modern-day, logical formulation of the authenticity question in Salazar Bondy’s work—i.e., his thesis that properly speaking, Latin American philosophy, as a genuine ‘philosophical’ tradition, *does not exist*. It is formulated as an answer to a factual question, but one that is *co-determined* by the social and historical particularities of entrenched economic underdevelopment and imperial domination. By conceiving of cultural domination as structural dependency, that is, as a rational structure that is formal and systematic in nature, Salazar Bondy began to seek out methods of philosophical analysis appropriate for examining the logical interrelation between structures: analytic philosophy stood wing-side, waiting as a resource.

And yet, over the years, many have forgotten that much of early Latin American analytic philosophy was in lockstep with the emancipatory goals and political projects of post-independence nations. In the end, for Salazar Bondy as for Villoro and Miró Quesada, the logical form of the authenticity question was ultimately *subordinate* to the broader concerns with which Latin American intellectuals had been consistently engaged for over a century: emancipation from domination and the search for cultural identity. Even Bunge’s rejection of the existential tradition and adoption of Anglo-American logical positivism can be seen as an emancipatory challenge to the restrictive intellectual landscape of authoritarian Argentina. But this did not then carry over into his conception of philosophy, as he declared in a recent interview: “I don’t think that Latin America constitutes a distinct area of philosophy. Latin America is philosophically just as pluralistic as North America, Western Europe, India, or Japan” (Nuccetelli citing Gilson 2010: 344). This universalist view of philosophy—that is, the view that there is nothing characteristically distinct in Latin American philosophy because philosophy is a universal discipline that can be practiced anywhere and by anyone trained in its methods regardless of regional affiliation—is markedly different from those of the aforementioned Latin American analytic philosophers. So what changed?

One important clue comes to us from the disciplinary reception of Latin American philosophy on the world stage in the 1940s. For instance, on May 13, 1943 a brief article appeared in *The Journal of Philosophy* announcing the first Inter-American Conference of Philosophy, which was held earlier that year at Yale University. Twenty of the forty participants came from Latin America. Among the Latin American panel subjects noted were “the Interrelations of American and European Thought, Value of Existence and The Philosophy of Culture” (Schneider et al. 1943: 280). Almost a full year before the publication of *Minerva* and the emergence of significant numbers of Anglo-Analytic texts in Spanish, the conference did not attract major attention from mainstream North American journals and was in fact contained as the last entry on the last page of the journal’s “notes and news” appendix. But aside from the lack of interest, as shown in this ancillary status, there were no identifiably negative comments; it ended with summaries of organizational plans for the First Inter-American Congress of philosophy. By 1949, however, things were substantially different. On March 3 of that year an article by the title “Present Tendencies in Latin American Philosophy” was prominently featured in the journal. It was written in English by the Brazilian philosopher and Guggenheim fellow Euryalo Cannabrava (1908–1981)—a figure who also turned away (in his case) from Heidegger and Bergson to logical positivism. The article opens as follows:

Recently there occurred in the United States of America a Congress of Philosophy at which for the first time Latin American thought was conspicuously represented in North America. As far as I know, all the tendencies of speculation from Mexico to Argentina received clamorous and in many cases eloquent attention. All the irrational ingredients of idealistic metaphysics and existential humanism appeared with their bold effort to substitute emotional outbursts for methodical inquiry. According to these philosophies reason is useless and burdensome...the result is that the philosophic statements of these schools of thought convey the illusion of presenting arguments. However, none of these ‘arguments’ remains when you attempt to discover precisely what they are by paying careful attention to the meanings of the propositions in which they seem to occur (1949: 113).

According to Cannabrava, Latin American thought suffers from at least three fatal flaws that have prevented it from rising to the status of a well-respected critical science. (He cites Rudolf Carnap as an exemplar of the latter). First, it is highly subjective. Because “these philosophies are the products of artistic imagination seasoned by the dramatic issues of the contemporary scene,” Latin American philosophy does not seem to place “the discovery of truth” as the primary goal of philosophic inquiry. “Instead, there is endless talk about values and axiological systems with man at the center” (114–115). Second, its tools and methods are unreliable. Instead of “conciseness,” “explicit assertions,” and the development of logical arguments based on precise use of technical terms, it employs inconsistent, suggestive, and esthetic formulations in its philosophical language. The result of such “impressionistic and literary” use of language, when coupled with the first vice, is that “verbalism, estheticism, and subjectivism are the permeating yeast in

the fermentation of Latin American thought” (113). Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, Cannabrava associates these flaws with the influence of the existential and phenomenological tradition in Latin America. He expresses special concern for the use of language in these traditions, arguing that their ambiguous nature and “abundance of possible significations” precludes their standing as genuine philosophic traditions... thus their adoption in Latin America stands as a barrier towards the development of philosophy proper in the region.

In an unexpected twist, he adds that “the devastating prestige of German philosophy in Latin America,” which depends on “its lack of intelligibility, on its metaphysical abuses and frequent violations of the rules of correct thinking” are paradoxically the very things that contributed to its success in Latin America. That is to say, these traditions were highly appealing to an underdeveloped (or in his view, nonexistent) philosophical community because they “put philosophy within easy reach” of non-rigorously trained thinkers and public intellectuals, as “it made philosophy the product of mystical raptures and the fostering of *innate dispositions* instead of a *technical discipline*” (114, my emphasis). Perhaps to no surprise, for Cannabrava, the one area where Latin American thought seems to have risen to “profound insights or genuine discoveries” is with “Latin America’s attempts to work out a philosophy of science” (117). They are thus far, however, only rudimentary efforts not yet on par with Anglo-European philosophies of science that are further along in the developmental continuum of Western empirical science and European philosophy.

Holding suspect the intellectual maturity of Latin American inhabitants and then using one’s own previously-held conception of rationality as a universal standard to devalue the non-European is a theoretical tactic that dates back to the conquest. Rather than an antiquated or anachronistic view, Cannabrava draws upon prevalent midcentury attitudes that emerged from colonial-era *racialized* frameworks, and which interpret the intellectual aptitude of the non-European as permanently in question. As Michael Monahan has argued, “in this situation, one way to establish one’s legitimacy as a rational agent is to produce what is incontrovertibly philosophy” (17).

As Cannabrava’s article demonstrates, by the late 1940s Latin American philosophy began to be held suspect on the world stage along some of the same lines as colonial-era inquiries into the Native’s rationality. This has been difficult to see because what was being critiqued—namely, the association between Latin American thought and the modern existential tradition—was not without merit following the strong link between authoritarianism and existentialism in midcentury Chile and Argentina. Today, it has become especially difficult to try and disentangle the intricately braided narrative of disciplinary developments (especially in forms of argumentative reasoning) and neo-imperial, uninformed prejudices that coalesce whenever the issue of Latin American identity—or, for that matter, the specificity of the subfield itself— is held as *philosophically* suspect, whether by Anglo-European or Latin American philosophers themselves.

In response to this reception of Latin American philosophy, a strong internal current emerged in the 1940s and 1950s that began to pursue philosophy along more mainstream Anglo-American lines, paradoxically helping to contribute to the

perception that Latin American philosophy is based on mimicry and imitation of Euro-American models, or that original arguments are not endemic to the tradition. We find, for instance, philosophers like Fernando Salmerón who began promoting the idea that “young philosophers should go to Oxford and American universities to do their graduate studies” instead of staying in Latin America (Pérez and Ortiz-Millán 2010: 204). In the second half of the twentieth century, this appearance of an ‘imitative’ or non-authentic character to Latin American philosophy undoubtedly contributed to the lack of respect and attention from mainstream philosophic circles in the English-speaking world (operating under the definition of philosophy noted earlier); what became less evident is the ways in which the philosophical production that merited such responses was itself shaped by the prior devaluation of the field from these same circles and intellectual trajectories. As the institutional practice of philosophy in Latin America became more normalized and substantial interaction with international journals and academic conferences emerged, this type of epistemic imperialism waned in visibility but persisted in spirit, deployed, for the most part, through argumentative methodologies rather than explicit views. (As an anecdote, a few years ago, while waiting for an elevator at an Eastern APA meeting, I ran into a philosopher working on classical epistemology at a prominent Latin American university. After exchanging very pleasant conversation that included our respective areas of specialization, she expressed surprise that such a thing as ‘Latin American philosophy’ existed as a subfield, as she had never heard of it.)

In the last few decades prominent figures in the field have tried to address this legacy of inattention, devaluation and neglect by attempting to explain what Renzo Llorente (following some prominent figures) describes as “the disappointing results of Latin American philosophy” in producing original contributions to the discipline (2007: 19). While some have looked to the role of the history of philosophy in producing what they see as non-philosophical, doxographical accounts of Latin American thought [*pensamiento*], Llorente, for instance, partially rejects this view and instead isolates three principal causes for “the unoriginality that characterizes Latin American philosophy” today: one, “the hegemony of continental philosophy as a paradigm for the practice of philosophy,” two, the lasting influence of Ortega Y Gasset’s literary style (which “eschews technical language”), and three, the continued role of Latin American philosophers in public life—“a condition that is typically inimical to the kind of professional discipline required to produce original work in philosophy” (20).

Without devaluing Llorente’s wider contributions to Latin American philosophy or of scholars sympathetic to these views, especially at so critical a moment in the field’s history, it is helpful to point out that nearly a *half-century* after Cannabrava’s devaluation of the field for its alleged inability to present propositional “arguments”, Llorente is drawing on some of the same theoretical assumptions about the discipline of philosophy that, having been folded into systematized lines of argument over time, have gradually lost their currency as imperial forms of abstract, universal thinking. This is especially prevalent in the association between underdeveloped philosophical traditions in Latin America and methods of analysis (in this case, those of continental philosophy) that believed to deviate from the

accepted standards for producing incontrovertible philosophy in the conventional, Anglophone philosophical world. He writes:

Why is continental philosophy likely to inhibit the development of original philosophy? The main reason, it seems to me, is that continental philosophy tends to foster a highly exegetical approach to philosophy, and, hence, an approach that is less apt than more ‘analytical’ techniques to encourage and promote original work. (This is perhaps especially true in those countries that do not have the benefit of a strong philosophical tradition). It is also true, of course, that certain varieties of continental philosophy tend to resemble cultural criticism as much as they do philosophy, and thus Latin American philosophers who adopt these models are likely to produce work whose *philosophical* merit and import will appear questionable (20).

Worth noting is the way in which the concern for the production of “original” arguments in philosophy has now lost all connection with the initial, historically-situated concerns of Latin American thinkers who first formulated the question of authenticity in the nineteenth century (i.e., as emancipation from oppression and the concern with cultural identity following European colonization). This is particularly troublesome given the genesis of Latin American philosophy in foreign philosophical frameworks, such as medieval scholasticism and Iberian humanism, which were not ‘original’ to the region. This is not to suggest that in order to produce work that could be recognized as Latin American philosophy one must reference or engage these issues; my reasoning here is simply to advocate for certain theoretical perspectives based on prior points of *exclusion*, particularly when that exclusion operates on stealth mode. Such exclusions can foreclose the opening of theoretical, disciplinary, and institutional spaces where methods of analysis best suited to a diverse range of philosophic interest may be developed in/by Latin America(ns) and supported by international philosophical communities.

Latin American analytic philosophy, since its inception in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, has been a diverse and dynamic field, with a wide spectrum of important research agendas that cannot be reduced to one or two isolated traditions or ‘strains’. (It is also important to add that its development in Latin America has as much to do with individual interests in its classical problems on the part of Latin American philosophers as it does with factors I have outlined, and that one should not equivocate its philosophical output with a reactionary, neocolonial mentality). However, it is clear that following key shifts in the formalization of philosophy (i.e., as a technical discipline) a particular tendency arose that became, if not dominant, highly influential. This is the ‘universalizing’ conception of philosophy that emerged from the introduction of Anglo-Analytic philosophy in the 1940s and 1950s and which won over the politically-informed, humanistic interpretations of philosophy by Latin American analytic philosophers (i.e., those of Villoro, Miró Quesada and Salazar Bondy) upon the field’s emergence on the world stage.

Unraveling these tendencies is important because it allows us to see that today Latin American philosophy is at a crossroads in regards to mainstream philosophic practice in the English-speaking world. Its persistent devaluation no longer shows up most visibly in derogatory evaluations (as in Cananbrava’s reception) but

through disciplinary exclusions and continued puzzlement about its alleged specificity as a philosophical subfield. Manuel Vargas, whose work has engaged both traditional themes in the Anglophone philosophical world and distinct issues in Latin American philosophy aptly pointed out in a 2007 interview that there were “no programs in, say, the *Gourmet Report*’s top 30 philosophy PhD programs in the US that have a single scholar with any expertise in Latin American philosophy” (Vargas 2007).

The roots of this professional marginalization are of course complex, but one rarely discussed and alarming aspect involves what I see as the pre-reflective reenactment of imperial cross-cultural dynamics, especially those that relate to knowledge production and cultural difference. It is interesting that of the many conceptual resources developed by Latin American philosophers in the last half-century, only those that most easily fit within recognizable frameworks of incontrovertible philosophy in the Anglophone philosophical world have received significant attention (relative to other conceptual resources in Latin American philosophy). Originating in Brazil, the non-classical system of logic known as ‘paraconsistent logic’ (for its ability to accept certain contradictions) is one such case. Though it is highly innovative and captivating, by contrast, equally cutting-edge work on philosophy of race (as in *mestizaje* or racial mixture) often goes unexamined by the North American philosophical community. Thus, while it may be true that “work on race, ethnic, and national identity have long histories in Latin American philosophy, [in] the Anglophone world these issues were treated by philosophers as though they had appeared in the mid-to-late 1980s in the U.S. for the first time in world history” (Vargas 2007).

Historically, one way to get around this problem is to posit the view that, after half a millennia, the historical conditions which begat the power differentials in the development of colonial-era philosophical traditions are no longer present, or only remotely connected to the constituting questions, puzzles, and concerns of modern Latin American philosophical communities. The marginalization of topics in cultural identity, for example, could have acquired their marginal status in the 1980s due to the palpable tensions in Academe over the culture wars and multiculturalism debates. While this may be part of the larger picture, an equally integral part of understanding the current state of the discipline involves a renewed awareness about the pre-colonial legacies of domination that have worked their way into the disciplinary prejudices of post-conquest philosophical traditions. But for this, further historical considerations in pre-conquest thought, though brief, are necessary.

### **Pre-Columbian Philosophies and Epistemic Imperialism**

Geographically, the region now known as Latin America stretches from the southern border of the United States down through Central America and on to the southernmost tip of Chile in South America. It also includes the islands of the Caribbean since they too fell under European colonial rule in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Prior to the conquest, it was home to robust Mesoamerican and

Andean civilizations such as Olmec, Maya, Inca, Aztec, Toltec, Mixtec, Nazca, Moche, Huari and more. Although there is some disagreement about the name's origin, even amongst scholars, it is commonly traced back to the 1860s when Napoleon III of France, following the successful invasion of Mexico in the Franco-Mexican war (1862–1863), attempted to establish a neocolonial French empire in what was then known as Ibero-America or Hispanic (from *hispania*, the Roman name for the Iberian peninsular region) America. To help displace Spanish and Portuguese influence in the Americas without inciting political frictions with the two European powers, the French used the term 'Latin' to reinforce the affiliation with *Roman* culture of the region's inhabitants, as the majority fell under the domain of Latin-based language communities following colonization from Spain and Portugal. The idea of "pan-Latinism", which Napoleon III used to theorize his ambitious project of cultural expansion (which began by installing Archduke Maximilian as Emperor of Mexico in 1864), had emerged a decade earlier in French intellectual circles; it can be particularly attributed to the writings of Michel Chevalier (1806–1879) who, following an excursion to Mexico in the 1830s, used the term *Europe Latine* (vs. *L'Amérique Latine*) as a cultural reference to denote differences between 'Anglo-Saxon' peoples and the 'Latin' peoples of French origin (Holloway 2008: 7, Chevalier 1836: 463). Thus, although relatively modern in coinage, the *idea* of Latin America as a unified concept only began in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century with the European 'discovery' and colonization of Mesoamerica and Native Amerindian territories, or what Spanish explorers called the 'New World'.

*Companion* contributor, Luis Fernando Restrepo sheds light on the development of post-conquest philosophy in Latin America by pointing out how the European discovery of the New World also signaled an epistemic rupture for Europeans. That is to say, from the European perspective, because Colonization introduced a constellation of moral, theological, juridical, and international political issues that were without precedent in Western Europe, it set in motion a groundswell of theoretical and philosophic inquiry aimed at providing clear conceptual foundations through which these issues could be addressed and debated (through Scholastic and Catholic thought, for example). There arose pressing issues, such as the lack of reference in the scriptures to the New World, the rational standing of native Amerindians, and the morality of the conquest, all of which received significant attention in the newly-established network of Jesuit schools (*colegios*) and Catholic universities (37). He writes:

The encounter of civilizations such as the Maya and the Aztecs with sophisticated time-reckoning systems that could account for past events far beyond that of ancient and biblical cultures shook European's notions of time and space. From this perspective, 1492 was a traumatic experience for European consciousness, a rupture in Western thought that inaugurated the modern age, as it was unquestionably a catastrophic event for the indigenous peoples of the Americas and subsequently the enslaved Africans forcibly brought to this continent (38).

One way to cope with this sense of epistemic rupture is to graft the interpretive framework of the conquering culture onto the indigenous and to establish a system of regulatory and administrative mechanisms that help control the development of new cultural formations by legitimizing only those forms of knowledge universally recognized by the framework of the culture in power. New linguistic, religious, political and social conventions support this endeavor. As evidence of this cultural anxiety, Restrepo points to a uniquely recurrent pattern in European commentaries on the Indies, which consistently point to their radical “novelty and incommensurability” with Western modes of thought. He specifically points to colonial-era descriptions of the region as “far from everything ever written, ab initio into our times,” and that “the insufficiency of European languages, knowledge, and reference frameworks” to comprehend New World phenomena is stressed throughout these accounts (39). For instance, in cataloguing and preparing taxonomies for European encyclopedias, European explorers ran into the problem that “American fauna [did] not seem to fit into the classification scheme inherited from antiquity”; rather than try and conceptualize or preserve this difference through the conservation of indigenous perspectives (which required the ability to recognize them as such), American fauna was recoded into already-familiar classificatory frameworks using the organizing schemata of first century A.D. European texts, such as Pliny’s *Natural Historia* (39). One of the consequences of grafting classificatory systems based on Western natural science onto non-Western ones is that it paved the way for the emergence of industrial capital exploitation of Latin America’s natural resources, as they were now ‘mapped’ under a framework commensurable with the Western view of objects as de-animated matter (49, citing Pratt, 1992).

Part of the problem of preserving or respecting indigenous perspectives, contrary to popular thought, is not that Amerindian worldviews were simply seen as heretical, but that Amerindians were not seen as having a constituting perspective in the first place. Time and again references appear that describe the peoples of the New World as having “no written history” or literate traditions capable of producing higher forms of culture (49). Consider, for instance, the first letter to be sent from Brazil. On May 1, 1500, Pedro Vaz de Caminha sent a letter to King Manuel I of Portugal detailing his impression of native Amerindians. He writes: “They seem to me people of such innocence that if one could understand them and they us, they would soon be Christians, because they do not have or understand any belief,” and thus “there can easily be stamped upon them whatever belief we wish to give them”. This ‘blank slate’ cultural assumption, which Gayatri Spivak has called the assumption of *terra nullis*, marks an important point of difference between European receptions of Eastern intellectual traditions like Buddhism or Daoism, which fall under ancient East–West binaries, and Amerindian intellectual traditions. While the former have historically helped to define the boundaries of European intellectual traditions (and of Europe itself) by reciprocally defining non-European equivalencies (i.e., not as a *value* equivalence but as the ‘other’ of the West) the latter were seen as *less* than ‘other’. Instead, Amerindian intellectual traditions were absorbed into North–South *hierarchical and exclusionary* systems of binary thought. To Europe, Daoism is recognizably other. Pre-colonial Amerindian

intellectual traditions, on the other hand, have largely failed to register even as competing schools of thought despite “an established tradition of native thinkers known as *Tlamatinime*, or *those who know something*” (Restrepo 2010: 42).

In an especially informative entry, *Companion* contributor James Maffie has noted the extent to which contact-era indigenous thought reflected metaphysical and epistemic principles radically alien to post-Socratic Western thought. According to Maffie, Aztec (Nahua) and Inca (Andean) philosophies were guided by principles of reciprocity, equilibrium, balance and mutual exchange that presided over a flux-filled universe where humans always hung precariously in the balance. Under this account, “*processes* rather than perduring objects or substances are ontologically fundamental. Activity, motion, flux, time, change, and transformation are the principal notions for understanding things” (13, my emphasis). These equilibrating processes, in turn, are guided by a single “dynamic, vivifying, eternally self-generating,” animated (yet non-intentional) force which the Aztecs called “*Teotl*” and the Inca, “*Camaquen*” (13). *Camaquen* (also called *camac*, *upani*, or *amaya*), like a Spinozistic substance, permeated all aspects of the cosmos and “appears to be coextensive with existence as such” (10). Like the Andean *camaquen*, for the Nahua, *teotl* is the vivifying element in the cosmos that, “properly understood,” is “*neither being nor non-being*” but simply takes the present progressive form, “*becoming*”: “*Teotl neither is nor is not: Teotl becomes*” and is at bottom, “ontologically ambiguous” as *unordered* (i.e., it is neither “determined or governed top-down by laws or principles” nor disordered or “chaotic”) (13–14). It is to be understood in terms of “the autochthonous Nahua notion of *nepantla*” (14). This is a crucially different concept than those found in Western metaphysics. *Nepantla* can be broadly conceived as a processive totality that brings balance to all aspects of the cosmos through an act of “middling,” a ‘thirding’ of sorts that places all things “within a ‘borderland,’ i.e., a dynamic zone of mutual interaction, reciprocal influence, unstable and diffuse identity, and transformation” (14). It cuts across conventional categories and leads to one always being “betwixt and between” categories, as in a ceaseless state of *nepantlatli* (the muddled balance between two endpoints, where anything “is neither this nor that, yet both”) (16).

Although these principles harmonize with many Eastern concepts, they have not received similar attention throughout the Anglophone philosophical world. One reason, other than those noted earlier, might be that methods of philosophical analysis based on logical principles rooted in Aristotelian rules of thought are fundamentally unequipped to address the metaphysical complexity and *ambiguity* of Nahua thought. Maffie insists that, contrary to Western, post-Socratic epistemology,

Nahua epistemology does not embrace semantic goals such as truth for truth’s sake, correct description, or accurate representation. The aim of cognition is walking in balance upon the slippery earth, and epistemologically good (*cualli*) cognition is that which promotes this aim... Nahua philosophy conceives of truth in terms of authenticity, genuineness, and well-rootedness *in* and non-referential disclosing *of* *teotl*—*not* in terms of correspondence, aboutness, or representation (contra most Western philosophy)...*expressing one’s understanding of teotl requires a non-binary mode of expression...*

artistic activity generally, but especially *singing and poetry*—rather than *advancing of discursive arguments*—is the truest most authentic way of expressing one’s understanding of *teotl*. Philosophers are perforce poet-singers and artists who unconceal *teotl* through metaphorical speech and artistic image (19–20, my emphasis).

When Cannabrava launched his attack on Latin American philosophy one of his guiding concerns was with methods of philosophical analysis that deviated from the use of explicit assertions and the pursuit of logical truths, expressing utmost distress over disciplinary perspectives that made reference to “what is unexpressed” in a particular theory or philosophical work (114). The specter of European colonialism has ensured, however, that to talk about what is “Latin American” is to simultaneously talk about what was built upon the violent eradication of Native Amerindian interpretive frameworks—of what was *unexpressed* (or has become inexpressible) by means of European epistemic orthodoxies. It is not this event, but the *forgetfulness* or covering-over of it by means of universalizing perspectives in mainstream philosophic practice that I refer to when I use the term epistemic imperialism.

Consider, for example, the difference between pre-Socratic and pre-Columbian philosophical traditions. Given Maffie’s accounts of Nahua metaphysics as flux-filled and irreducibly ambiguous, it would seem to be the case that many of the same disciplinary currents that negate the philosophical status of pre-Columbian thought (for its metaphysical and ontological ambiguity) also question the status of pre-Socratic thought along the same charge. Although some may, in fact, so do, current disciplinary trends, conference programming and departmental curricula do not reflect such a view. To understand why this might be the case, one need only recall that the relation of pre-Socratic thought to the philosophical tradition that began with Plato and Aristotle is substantially different from that between pre-Columbian thought and post-Socratic philosophy. Between the first two there is an implicitly shared metric of conceptual and linguistic exchange that emerged from autochthonous cultural circumstances, and which was forced upon Native Amerindian cultures: the Greek alphabet. It is often forgotten that along with the European imposition of romance languages, Greco-Roman alphabetic script was also implanted in the region as part of the civilizing mission. This had profound consequences for the development of Latin American thought, as alphabetization brought with it a host of interrelated epistemic conventions that shaped the conceptual boundaries of what could be articulated through these new linguistic frameworks. The most important of these conventions is subject-predicate grammar, as it allows for the formulation of meaning as *independent* from the objects it references (exclusionary subject-object dualisms, to recall, are not native to Nahua thought). But one could argue that a similar change occurred in Homeric Greece with the introduction of alphabetic technologies in 720 B.C.E., as Walter Ong famously argued (1988). There, too, a profound transformation took place based on the ability of a standardized system of signs to unburden the mind from rogue mimetic skills, and which, once internalized by a culture, promoted the expansion of *abstract* thought and de-contextual *analysis* (birthing, among other things,

post-Socratic philosophy). But the introduction of these alphabetic ‘technologies’, to use Ong’s term, in ancient Greece did not violently eradicate or cover-over orality as such. In fact, we find discussions in Plato’s dialogues concerning cultural anxieties about the shifting landscape of traditional modes of thought and the social practices (such as poetic oratory and rhetoric) they supported. By contrast, in contact-era Mesoamerica no such inquiries could take place because Europeans did not have the sufficient interpretive background to recognize the existing interpretive frameworks of Native Amerindian communities, whose ‘orality’ was dispersed, not in words, but in an intricate communicative network co-constituted by non-alphabetic graphic systems and embodied practices. In fact, the Nahua scholar James Lockhart has remarked that the very notion of a ‘word’ was alien to contact-era Nahuatl speakers, who, when forced to abandon native writing systems for alphabetic writing, “transcribed sound, syllables, and sentences but not words” (qtd. in Mignolo 2004: 296). The anthropologist Mark King has reinforced this point in other Amerindian languages, adding that the calendar day names in Quiché [K’iche’] are untranslatable into Spanish as proper names—that “in actual practice names are ‘read’ not as words in themselves but as a kind of oral rebus for quite other words,” which are in turn linked back to “the *social actions* that characterize them” instead of “a fixed inventory of symbols” that map one-to-one onto an ‘objective’ world (113).

Language in the form of alphabetic script was a powerful instrument of colonial rule. Basing philosophical traditions solely on, among other things, explicit assertion and later, the fulfillment of conditions for semantic truth (which is based on the conventions of subject-predicate grammar), created conditions where it became possible, over time, to overlook legacies of domination operative in knowledge production in Latin America. Under these conditions, it is difficult to talk about such a thing as an ‘original’ Latin American philosophy insofar as the very medium used to produce philosophical assertions were themselves a product of European conquest. Again, this is not to suggest that modern-day Latin American philosophy, broadly conceived, cannot produce original arguments (as traditionally viewed in the English-speaking philosophical world) or that Latin American philosophers who take up ahistorical projects in the classical problems of, say, logic or the philosophy of mathematics are contributing to the disciplinary myopia about the role of colonial history in shaping what could count as philosophic practice in Latin America. There are many philosophers who take up what could easily be considered formal, ahistorical methodologies in their work and who are also attentive to historical considerations in Latin American philosophy (the prolific work of co-editor Otávio Bueno comes to mind here). What is of concern is the uncritical deployment of these methodologies in a way that promotes forgetfulness about their universalizing tendencies. On this view, what makes universalist tendencies/approaches imperialist or neocolonial is when their universalism covers over specificities that would allow the legacies of colonial domination and imperial rule to be meaningfully articulated and affirmed, especially by individuals who do not easily fit within the normative parameters of disciplinary practice but who nonetheless wish to reflect critically on problems associated with (among other things) Latin American identity.

## Conclusion

Philosophy as it is practiced in the majority of the English-speaking world today does not often tolerate the kind of ambiguity it once helped impose on other cultures. It forgets that the very problem of Latin American cultural identity—so often devalued as not being of philosophical significance—was itself first constructed by means of colonial-era scholastic debates about the possible standing of Native Amerindians as humans—based, of course, on Western conceptions of rational agency. On this account, Latin American philosophy was born when the conceptual boundaries of ‘Latin America’ were erected through the twofold process of eradication or suppression of native Amerindian intellectual traditions and the simultaneous transplantation of foreign ones, the latter deemed of *universal* worth. The decontextual focus on *originality* or *authenticity* that guides philosophic inquires into the status of Latin American philosophy today is therefore doubly problematic in a historical milieu where what is ‘original’ was forcibly suppressed through mechanisms of colonial and imperial rule.

Latin American Philosophy is at a crossroads. As the Chilean Juan Manuel Garrido ironically stated, “far more surprising than our own lack of ‘authentic’ Latin American philosophy, is the fact that Latin America has not become a major problem for European philosophy” (26). Although headway in raising the profile of the field is consistently being made through the long-standing efforts of senior and emerging scholars—Eduardo Mendieta, for instance, has proposed a view of the field as “a way to engage in metaphilosophical speculation about philosophy itself” (Mendieta 2007: 34)—we are in a situation where vast amounts of our creative and intellectual efforts as philosophers are being directed towards defending claims against the ‘unoriginality’ and ‘inauthentic’ status of our philosophical productions. Latin American philosophy, like any evolving set of concerns and methodologies in philosophy, should not be held above question. The kinds of questions it has to bear and weather today, however, are all too often informed by uncritical prejudices and assumptions that mirror imperial prejudices that emerged from colonial-era racialized frameworks.

When making claims such as these it is important to point out that Latin American philosophy is a conceptually diverse field with a variety of philosophical approaches and methodologies. Some, for instance, will continue to pursue work on classical problems in the Anglophone philosophical world and see this as constituting an important contribution to Latin American philosophy by introducing unique perspectives or approaches, or simply by promoting the development of philosophical traditions in Latin America. Others will continue to stress the view of Latin American philosophy as irrevocably shaped by underlying forces of cultural domination and the situated circumstances in which the field presently finds itself, pointing out the fact that at the time the *Companion* went to press, philosophers at the University of Puerto Rico were under police occupation and active military invasion.

The editorial decisions of the Blackwell *Companion* wisely accommodate the diversity of these views, creating a pluralistic guide to the field that addresses the influence of colonial history in the field’s development while providing ample

coverage of technical topics that engage the *practice* of philosophy in Latin America today. For these reasons, the *Companion* is not only an essential resource for academic libraries, field specialists and philosophers interested in the field; it is an equally engaging interdisciplinary handbook for non-academic and lay audiences with interests in Latin American history and academic philosophy in general. It will no doubt serve as the field's standard for years to come.

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