

## **Fact, Propaganda or Legitimate Aspiration? Frondizi on the Philosophic Unity of the Two Americas**

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### **English Abstract**

This paper examines arguments made by the Argentinean philosopher Risieri Frondizi in his essay "On the Unity on the Philosophies of the Two Americas" regarding the legitimacy of unifying the philosophic traditions of the Americas. It argues that the present situation is much as it was in the 1950's: the two largest philosophical communities of the Americas are still generally isolated from each other *and* the integration of these communities is a legitimate aspiration. The paper then examines the concern, mentioned by Frondizi, that Pan-Americanism is political propaganda concealing U.S. imperialism in Latin America. It concludes that Frondizi's arguments in favor of unifying American philosophies should encourage philosophers across the Americas to integrate the philosophical traditions of the Americas through a dialogue that explicitly addresses the United States' history of anti-democratic actions in Latin America.

### **Resumen en español**

Este artículo examina los argumentos formulados por el filósofo argentino Risieri Frondizi en su ensayo "Sobre la unidad de las filosofías de las dos Américas" con respecto a la legitimidad de la unificación de las tradiciones filosóficas de las Américas. Argumenta que la situación actual es tanto como lo fue en la década de 1950: las dos comunidades filosóficas más grandes de las Américas en general siguen siendo aislados unos de otros y la integración de estas comunidades es una aspiración legítima. Este artículo entonces se examina la preocupación, mencionada por Frondizi, que el panamericanismo es un tipo de propaganda política que oculta el imperialismo de EE.UU. en América Latina. Llega a la conclusión de que los argumentos de Frondizi en favor de unificación de las filosofías de las Américas deben fomentar los filósofos de las Américas para integrar las tradiciones filosóficas de las Américas a través de un diálogo que aborde explícitamente la historia de las acciones anti-democráticas en América Latina de los Estados Unidos.

### **Resumo em português**

Este documento examina os argumentos apresentados pelo filósofo argentino Risieri Frondizi em seu ensaio "Sobre a unidade nas filosofias de duas Américas", com relação a legitimidade de unificar as tradições filosóficas das Américas. Alega que a atual situação tanto quanto era na década de 1950: as duas maiores comunidades filosóficas das Américas ainda são geralmente isoladas umas das outras e a integração destas comunidades é uma aspiração legítima. O documento, em seguida, examina a preocupação, mencionada por Frondizi, que o Pan-Americanismo é uma propaganda

política ocultando o imperialismo dos EUA na América Latina. Conclui-se que os argumentos de Frondizi em favor de filosofias americanas unificadoras deveriam encorajar os filósofos através das Américas para integrar as tradições filosóficas das Américas através de um diálogo que aborda explicitamente a história dos Estados Unidos de ações antidemocráticas na América Latina.

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Risieri Frondizi opens his essay “On the Unity on the Philosophies of the Two Americas” with two questions about the state of philosophical unity in the Americas. While he wrote this essay more than sixty years ago, recent work on the topic of inter-American philosophical integration make Frondizi’s questions even more pertinent now than they were when he asked them in 1951.

Is there such a thing as a philosophic unity of the two Americas? We have recently heard so much about continental solidarity and Pan-Americanism that one cannot be surprised by reading about a so called “Pan-American philosophy.” Is this a piece of political propaganda, a legitimate aspiration or an actual fact? (Frondizi 1951, 617)

By the time that Frondizi published this essay, he had traveled far from his native Argentina to study and teach philosophy at over a dozen universities across the Americas, making him, as Gregory Pappas describes his unique but undervalued role in the history of philosophy, “a philosophical bridge between the Hispanic world and the Anglo-Saxon world” (Pappas 2007, 320). He was also the first philosopher fully versed in these two traditions to substantively engage the topic of inter-American philosophy which has received much recent attention. As a consequence, Frondizi’s work not only a bridges these traditions, but also serves as an indispensable guide for establishing a more cosmopolitan inter-American philosophical discourse. In particular, Frondizi’s analysis of Pan-American philosophy as an actual fact, political propaganda or legitimate aspiration helps us assess the legitimacy and purpose of inter-American philosophical integration and as well as navigate its potential obstacles.

This paper asks Frondizi’s questions anew and argues that the present situation of philosophy in the Americas is much as it was in the 1950’s: first, the two largest philosophical communities of the Americas are still generally isolated from each other and second, the integration of these communities continues to be a legitimate aspiration. The paper then examines the concern raised by Frondizi that efforts towards Pan-Americanism are political propaganda that either conceal or enable US imperialism in Latin America. This paper concludes that Frondizi’s arguments in favor of unifying American philosophies encourages contemporary philosophers across the Americas to expand their scholarly boundaries and integrate the philosophical traditions of the Americas that share a common interest in the improvement and fruition of human life. However Frondizi’s concerns regarding propaganda remind us that such an integration

must progress through a dialogue that is duly mindful of and explicit regarding the history of anti-democratic U.S. actions in Latin America.

## I. Two Philosophical Americas

Frondizi offered a blunt assessment on the state of philosophical unity in the Americas in 1951. Citing his experience across the Americas, he wrote “I have been a student and a professor of philosophy in South and North America [... and] the conclusion of my personal experience is that we live in two different worlds” (Frondizi 1951, 619). Even though they originated within European philosophical traditions, “the two Americas descended from two different Europes: one from Anglo-Saxon Europe, and the other from Latin-Europe” which in turn “not only gives both Americas a different tradition and point of departure but also a different *Weltanschauung*” (Frondizi 1951, 618). While they share some commonalities, Frondizi ultimately claimed that in 1951 “there is no unity of the philosophies of the two Americas” (Frondizi 1951, 622).

Frondizi explained that these traditions differ in more than origins and worldviews. Demonstrating a pragmatist orientation that other philosophers have cited, he argued that the greatest source of this difference is the different philosophical *problems* to which these traditions attend (Pappas 2011b).

The difference between the two Americas does not consist in the fact that they have different ideas; that the Ibero-Americans are idealists, for example, and the North Americans realists. If this were so, we would be closer that we actually are. The divergence goes farther than just a discrepancy in the solutions; it refers to the problems themselves. The two Americas are separated by dissimilar concerns; they are interested in different problems (Frondizi 1951, 619).

According to Frondizi, the “central problem for the Latin Americans is man and his creation,” a characterization that emphasizes the impact of vitalist movement that emerged in the early 20th Century as an alternative to the positivist philosophy that had dominated Latin American philosophy for a generation (Frondizi 1951, 620). Where Latin American philosophers focus on problems of culture, anthropology and aesthetics but ignore logic, “[t]he exact opposite is true in North America” (Frondizi 1951, 620). He describes the North as being dominated by analytic philosophy and logical positivism (philosophies that descend from the earlier versions of positivism that were rejected in early 20th Century Latin America) and says that the North American “interest in symbolic logic, methodology, philosophical analysis and semantics is so obvious that it is not necessary to insist upon it” (Frondizi 1951, 620).

While this characterization is less applicable today than it was then, it still holds to a great extent. Also, the two Americas are only slightly less philosophically isolated from each other than they were sixty years ago.[1] Commenting on the invisibility of Latin American philosophy within English-speaking philosophical circles, Eduardo Mendieta writes in the introduction to *Latin American Philosophy* that,

[O]ne of the most amazing things about the bibliographical work on philosophy published in English over the last decade or so is its utter silence about Latin American philosophy and philosophers (Mendieta 2003, 1).

Carlos Pereda makes the same case using a visual metaphor in his essay “Latin American Philosophy: Some Vices,” when he flatly states “[w]e are invisible”: this melancholic assertion alludes to the “non-place” that we occupy as Latin American philosophers or, in general, as philosophers in the Spanish or Portuguese language” (Pereda 2006, 192).

Just as Latin American philosophy is invisible to the overwhelming majority of philosophers in North America, the various philosophical traditions of Latin America received little influence from North America. The Spanish philosopher Jaime Nubiola says that the relationship between the English-speaking and Spanish-speaking philosophical worlds is marked by a “mutual incomprehension” (Nubiola 2005, 437). Discussing not just Latin American Philosophy but the larger Hispanic philosophical tradition, he writes, “[a] surprising fact in the historiography of the Hispanic philosophy of this century is its almost total opacity towards the American tradition” (Nubiola 1998, 31). Fortunately, philosophers from across the Americas have recently worked to bridge the philosophical divide that separates the two Americas and in the following section we will examine their reasons for doing so and compare them to Frondizi’s arguments for seeing Pan-American philosophy a legitimate aspiration.

## II. Integration as Legitimate Aspiration

Frondizi depicted the two Americas as a philosophical odd couple. Since “North-Americans think of philosophy as a rigorous science” where “Ibero-Americans ... prefer to sound un-scientific rather than to push aesthetic, religious, and political questions out of the picture,” the philosophy of the North appears “narrow and bloodless” to the South and Latin American philosophy “appears to be very vague to the North Americans” (Frondizi 1951, 621). Nonetheless, Frondizi urged them to recognize that “[t]he integration of both forms could do a great deal of good for the philosophies of both Americas” because they had developed philosophies that were not only compatible but complimentary (Frondizi 1951, 622).

The Americas can and must complement each other. We can offer a limitless fountain of emotivity and imagination, a full-blooded humanity. In their turn, the North American can contribute, through their great experience and ability in the technical handling of the methodological problems, semantics and logic. With their contribution, the Ibero-American man can become a philosopher; with the contribution of the Ibero-American attitude, the North American philosopher will realize that it is not necessary to cease being in order to become a philosopher (Frondizi 1951, 622).

A number of contemporary philosophers agree with Frondizi that ending this mutual isolation is a legitimate aspiration. Gregory Pappas, in his essay “The Latino Character of American Pragmatism,” problematizes commonly held assumptions about what counts as Latin American and North American by arguing that “Pragmatism is a philosophy that affirms and reflect values that are predominant and are cherished by Latin, not North America, culture” (Pappas 1998, 94). In his introduction to his anthology *Pragmatism in the Americas* he argues that once philosophers approach philosophy of the Americas with the ecumenical attitude that Frondizi espoused they will begin to “fill a void in the humanities” by showing that “there is a real affinity between the central questions of American Pragmatism and the topics and problems addressed by many Hispanic thinkers” (Pappas 2011a, 2).

We find another Frondizian call for an integrated American philosophical community in Eduardo Mendieta’s introduction to his anthology *Latin American Philosophy*. Mendieta discusses the emergence of what he calls the “*geo-political or world-historical*” school of Latin American thought that sees the region’s philosophy as a “response to the global processes of decolonization, the Cold War, [and] recolonization under international finance capitalism” (Mendieta 2003, 4). He suggests that such a school of thought might in time engender the kind of a greater American philosophy that Frondizi envisioned.

Perhaps in the near future, as a new generation of scholars and philosophers begins to develop, mature and conceive of a greater America that includes all of its subcontinents, we will begin to think of Latin American and North American philosophies as chapters in a larger geo-political and world-historical school of American philosophy from this hemisphere. This younger generation will read Emerson along with Rúbén Darío, Peirce with Ingenieros, Dewey with Vasconcelos, Zea with Wilson, Rorty with Dussel, as they become so many canonical figures in one larger continental tradition (Mendieta 2003, 5).

Guillermo Hurtado also shares Frondizi’s aspirations when he argues that conditions are ripe for “a genuine philosophical dialogue between the two Americas” (Hurtado 2006, 212). Hurtado claims that we can improve on the sporadic encounters between the North and South by fostering sustained and politically grounded dialogue “between pragmatism and the peculiar version of perspectivism and ratiovitalism ... spread over Latin America in the first half of the last century” (Hurtado 2006, 212). In the first essay published in the *Inter-American Journal of Philosophy* which he co-edits with Gregory Pappas, he envisions the journal as facilitating the Frondizian goal of an expanded philosophical discourse between the Americas that not only transverses scholarly boundaries but is guided by the pragmatist commitment to “democracy understood not simply as a form of government but as an ideal of our life together” (Hurtado 2010, 10). He shares Frondizi’s hope for a more humane and unified greater America saying that “together we imagine America as an ideal for life that we have yet to construct. Together we can make America into a space for democracy. In this way, we will all be Americans” (Hurtado 2010, 16).

These efforts are encouraging and uplifting for anyone who believes that a more cosmopolitan American philosophical tradition is a legitimate aspiration. However, in order to be fruitful, these efforts must balance the agreeable task of identifying inter-American *affinities* with the far more onerous work of addressing the *points of conflict between these traditions*, including the problem of Pan-Americanism as propaganda that that Frondizi mentions but does not develop. Frondizi's Latin American audience understood that when he mentioned propaganda he was alluding to the United State's long history of wolf-in-sheep's clothing foreign policy in Latin America, where neighborly rhetoric about Pan-American cooperation and democracy inevitably gave way to containment policies that destroyed democratic institutions and established instead authoritarian regimes conducive of U.S. corporate and Cold War interests. Because of this history of duplicity, calls for philosophical Pan-Americanism (even sincere and good-faith ones) are problematic as they might be or at least *be seen* as propaganda absconding North American designs on the region.

The following section will examine arguments *against* Pan-Americanism made by prominent Latin American thinkers that where as familiar in Latin America as they were unfamiliar in the North. While this essay supports Frondizi and his like-minded contemporaries on the legitimacy of philosophical dialogue, it also maintains that these laudable efforts will stall unless both sides – but especially North American philosophers—recall, examine and discuss the reasons against philosophical integration, including the poisonous legacy of U.S. imperialism and propaganda in Latin America.

### III. Political Propaganda and Other Problems

Latin American thinkers have long warned the citizens of their America about the perils of *nordomania* (the dangerous infatuation with North America) and to be suspicious of calls from the United States for greater Pan-Americanism (Rodó 1988, 71). This suspicion – warranted by the brutal history of US coups, invasions, proxy armies and betrayals – influenced the trajectory of Latin American philosophy for over a century (Grandin 2006). Much as Louis Menand argues in *The Metaphysical Club*, that North American pragmatism was indelibly shaped by the American Civil War, the Mexican historian and biographer Enrique Krauze argues in *Redeemers* that the U.S. occupation of Cuba, Puerto Rico, Guam and the Philippines at the end of the 1898 Spanish American War catalyzed a new spirit of Latin American philosophy that rejected all things North American, including Anglo-associated positivism, in favor of autochthonous vitalism, cultural authenticity and political autonomy (Menand 2002, Krauze 2011).

The Cuban writer José Martí delivered an early and prescient warning in his 1893 address *Nuestra América (Our America)* where he urged solidarity among Latin Americans fighting for freedom from Spain but also vigilance towards the “Colossus of the North,” even as it spoke of friendship.

[T]he time is near at hand when an enterprising and vigorous people who scorn or ignore Our America will even so approach it and demand a close relationship.... The scorn of our formidable neighbor who does not know us is Our America's greatest danger. And since the day of the visit is near, it is imperative that our neighbor know us, and soon, so that it will not scorn us. Through ignorance it might even come to lay hands on us. Once it does know us, it will remove its hand out of respect (Martí 1977, 93).

Of course, the visit came a mere five years later and their neighbor did much more than merely lay their hands on them. The first prominent Latin American philosopher to sound the alarm in the wake of the Spanish American War was José Enrique Rodó, whose 1900 *Ariel* borrowed characters from Shakespeare's *The Tempest* to weave an extended allegory about a Manichean struggle between the crude materialism of North American Caliban and the refined spiritualism of Latin American Ariel that would deeply influence subsequent generations of Latin American thinkers. Rodó presented the U.S. as a powerful but spiritually voided incarnation of all the worst elements of British utilitarianism that yielded physical triumphs but also to "a pallid and mediocre materialism and, ultimately, the lassitude of a lusterless enervation resulting from the quiet winding-down of all the mainsprings of moral life" (Rodó 1988, 83). For Rodó, philosophical union with the North spelled the spiritual death of Latin America.

The most emphatic critic of Pan Americanism was the Mexican philosopher and politician José Vasconcelos who drank deeply from the well of *arielismo*. Far from needing to emulate or join with their northern neighbors, Latin America needed to recognize that "[o]ur age became, and continues to be, a conflict of Latinism against Anglo-Saxonism (Vasconcelos 1997, 10). In his 1925 work *La raza cósmica* (*The Cosmic Race*) Vasconcelos scoffed at the idea of Pan-American friendship as a transparent Anglo ruse.

Not only were we defeated in combat; ideologically, the Anglos continue to conquer us....The founders of our new nationalism were, without knowing it, the best allies of the Anglo-Saxons, our rivals in the possession of the continent. The unfurling of our twenty banners at the Pan American Union in Washington, should be seen as a joke played by skillful enemies (Vasconcelos 1997, 11).

History has shown us that Vasconcelos' assessment of the United States' foreign policy was canny, as it indeed included the goal of fostering division among and within Latin American nation-states in order to minimize the possibility of a unified Latin American that might challenge U.S. political and economic interests. For example, less than three years after Frondizi published his essay describing Pan-Americanism as a legitimate aspiration and not a form of propaganda, the CIA deployed its most advanced propaganda campaign "execut[ing] its first full-scale covert operation in Latin America, overthrowing Guatemalan president Jacobo Arbenz and installing a more pliant successor" thus fostering great anger and suspicion towards the US for years to come (Grandin 2006, 42).

While these and other Latin American thinkers rejected integration and cautioned about the dangers of propaganda in the present moment, none opposed the general idea of greater inter-American cooperation so long as it was conducted fairly, voluntarily and in a way that preserved the integrity of both tradition. The concluding section will briefly offer suggestions on how we ought to proceed towards a greater American philosophy while avoiding the problems raised by Frondizi and other Latin American philosophers.

#### IV. Conclusion

The philosophies of the Americas are still mostly strangers to each other sixty years after Frondizi urged their unification. Philosophers are only beginning to uncover the wealth of affinities between these philosophies along with the problems that impede dialogue. A re-examination of Frondizi's work as well as the recollection of other Latin American philosophers' arguments on the relationship between these two American philosophies supports claims by contemporary philosophers like Hurtado and Pappas that pragmatism offers the broadest North American point-of-contact for these inter-American discussions. Emphasizing pragmatism as an example of North American philosophy facilitates the integration towards which Frondizi aspired, but for very different reasons than the ones he offered.

Frondizi hoped to unify the two philosophies so that they could *share their opposite and compatible philosophical gifts*. However, pragmatism facilitates integration not because it offers strengths that Latin America lacks but because, as Pappas point out, *pragmatism shares common problems and defining characteristics with Latin American philosophy* (Pappas 1998). We saw earlier that contemporary philosophers note that mutual misunderstanding hampers this relationship: emphasizing pragmatism as an example of North American philosophy corrects the view that all North Americans are reductivistic positivists or imperial propagandists. To advance contemporary efforts, we need to emphasize at least *three facets of pragmatism* in order to facilitate a fruitful inter-American philosophical dialogue.

First, we need to emphasize pragmatism as the *pluralist* philosophy that James famously likened to a hallway in a hotel that offered easy passage to the theologian as much as the chemist. We see this pluralism in contemporary pragmatism in the myriad problems that pragmatists engage as well as the fact that modern pragmatists are usually academic synthesizers who are never one thing, but are instead feminist-pragmatists or phenomenologist-pragmatists. Highlighting pragmatism's pluralism counters the view put forth by Rodó, Vasconcelos and even Frondizi that North American philosophers focus only on problems of language and method and are unfamiliar with other traditions and problems.

Another critique leveled at North American philosophy by philosophers like Rodó and Vasconcelos has to do with the idea of democracy. Rodó advocated keeping the Americas separate in order to stop the southward spread of form of homogenizing



democracy that extinguishes the vitality of the human spirit under the weight of mediocrity disguised as equality. This Platonic critique of democracy as a system incapable of distinguishing reason from appetite leads to the need to emphasize a second facet of pragmatism, namely its *conception of democracy* which Dewey described as “a way of life... controlled by personal faith in personal day-by-day working together with others” (Dewey 1988, 228). This democracy is not a tyranny of an inchoate majority but a commitment to associated living that grows from our inherent need to grow, learn, experiment and thrive *together*. It is a vision of democracy that posits we are not only physical and rational beings, but also aesthetic and gregarious. Emphasizing the pragmatist conception of democracy shows a North American concern for the very problems of man and culture that Frondizi identified at the core of the Latin American tradition. Also, it would highlight the fact that the actions of U.S. governments and corporations in Latin America ran contrary to the pragmatist ideal of democracy.

This disjunction between the pragmatist philosophy of the U.S. and its foreign policy leads us to the third facet of pragmatism that should be emphasized, namely the long history of conflict *within* the United States between our bellicose policies and the long *tradition of anti-imperialism and pacifism*. Vasconcelos argued in his *Eticá* that Dewey the philosopher and Dewey the admiral that wrested Manila from the Spanish were just two sides of the same Anglo imperialist coin (Vasconcelos 1939, 30). This only underlines the depth of misrecognition between these traditions as Dewey specifically decried U.S. imperialism in Mexico in his 1928 essay “Imperialism is Easy” among other works much as Henry David Thoreau opposed the 1846 Mexican-American War through civil disobedience and William James and Jane Addams opposed the U.S. annexations of Spanish territory in 1898 through their work in the American Anti-Imperialist League (Dewey 1981, 163; Beisner 1968). While recent authors are right to thematize and critique the white supremacist ideas and habits of these philosophers, it is also important to emphasize the tradition of North American philosophy that critiqued the imperialist policies that still poison inter-American dialogue.

As the Americas become more economically interdependent and demographically mixed, our lives, cultures and problems interconnect. We therefore need a greater American philosophical dialogue to inform our inter-twined politics, reflect on our conjoint lives and direct our mutual futures. Emphasizing pragmatism as a North American contribution to this dialogue highlights a tradition of American philosophers who chose democracy over empire, peace over war and saw human beings as *whole* beings and not the sum of their parts.

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## Notes

[1] I will follow philosophers ranging from Frondizi to Eduardo Mendieta, to Guillermo Hurtado by using the dichotomy of “North America” and “Latin America” and locating the prodigious tradition of Mexican philosophy within the latter category with which it shares a great deal of family resemblances, even though Mexico is geographically located within North America.

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