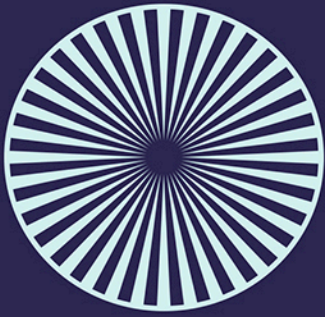


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Editors

## EDITORS' INTRODUCTION TO THE FIRST ISSUE

ROBERT ELI SANCHEZ, JR. AND CARLOS ALBERTO SÁNCHEZ

It is with great pride that we launch the first issue of the *Journal of Mexican Philosophy (JMxP)*. For far too long, academic philosophy in the English-speaking world has remained indifferent to the many attempts to shine a light on philosophy produced in Mexico, by Mexican philosophers, or about Mexican themes—including, for example, a batch of articles published by *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* in the 1940s, Patrick Romanell's landmark *The Making of the Mexican Mind* (1952), and the pioneering work of John Haddox, Martin Stabb, Amy Oliver, and William Cooper, among others. Of course, the reasons for this collective indifference toward Mexican philosophy in the US are not clear, nor are those that explain how it generated a parallel indifference in Mexico for at least the last 60 years (with some notable exceptions). However, our work for the past decade has endeavored to challenge this indifference by laboring to establish Mexican philosophy as a unique philosophical tradition worthy of our attention and effort.

Our goal in this journal is to transform indifference into passion and commitment, and to present Mexican philosophy as what we take it to be, namely, a rich philosophical tradition worthy of inclusion in the standard story of the West. In fact, a distinguishing feature of Mexican philosophy, one that sets it apart from other marginalized, peripheral, or (currently) less well-known philosophical traditions, is that given its particular historical relation to Western colonialism, together with the story of its emergence in modern Mexican history and Mexico's geographical proximity to the United States, it represents a critique of the Western tradition *from within*, one that serves as a model—available to insider and outsider alike—for combatting the sorts of marginalization and the kinds of silencing that Western philosophical hegemony makes possible.

This first Issue of *JMxP* represents and reflects this view of Mexican philosophy. As a whole, it illustrates the philosophical double-consciousness that afflicts Mexican philosophy, as it struggles with the search for philosophical

identity given that difference previously mentioned. The papers included here seek to identify, clarify, or problematize themes, figures, and traditions in such a way as to leave no question that Mexican philosophy has a designated place in both modern culture and in contemporary philosophy. We see this in Oliver's essay, which situates Mexican philosophy in a global philosophical program; we see it again in Vargas's introduction to Sor Juana, which brings Sor Juana's texts to bear on contemporary philosophical discussions by examining and analyzing her philosophical inheritance; and, finally, we see this in Hurtado's novel analysis of a persistent philosophical problem in Mexican culture—*malinchismo*—illustrating that Mexican philosophy is still evolving and can still contribute to the transformation of Mexican reality in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Also included in this first issue is an original translation of an essay by José Vasconcelos by Clinton Tolley. While there is nothing particularly inaugural about this piece by Vasconcelos, it represents another important objective of our journal: to eliminate the most common excuse as to why Mexican philosophy is not discussed in the classroom (i.e., that it is not available in English). As we know after publishing our anthology of Mexican philosophy a few years ago, publishing translations in book form takes a long time and requires overcoming a host of institutional hurdles. So, in each issue of this journal, we will publish one essay in translation by a major Mexican philosopher, or by philosophers working in this tradition who are not yet major but who ought to be.

In short, *JMxP* seeks to be a model for what mainstream journals should look like: thematically, culturally, and linguistically inclusive. While it is true that established academic philosophy journals in the US and Europe have become more open to publishing in different “non-Western” traditions in recent years, they are still wary of publishing in areas that do not fit standard categories and expectations, publicly for the sake of preserving “quality” and “rigor,” privately or unconsciously for the sake of preserving an outdated conception of what philosophy ought to be. While the public excuse sets up a false dichotomy between philosophy and a lack of rigor, the private excuse doubts that Mexican philosophy can be sufficiently rigorous to count as philosophy. Both of these excuses, however, ignore the fact that quality and rigor often (if not always) demand difference and diversity.

Thus we offer *JMxP* as a challenge to our philosophical comfort zones, insisting along the way that *JMxP* is not a niche journal for those already interested in Mexican philosophy. It is a journal for those interested in philosophy who are willing to think through the possibility that the Western tradition, understood in the familiar but parochial sense, has much to learn about itself, something that it can only do by (finally) confronting its own ignorance, indifference, and particularity. Hence, our aim, in part, is to

reimagine what a mainstream journal of philosophy looks like, what languages it publishes in, and who it encourages to publish. But mostly our aim is to provide a space for thinking about a tradition of philosophy that we identify with, one without which neither of us would have continued in the profession, and one that we hope will make philosophy welcoming to a much broader and more diverse community of students, scholars, colleagues, and friends.

## VALUING MEXICAN PHILOSOPHY: SUSPECT ENDEAVOR OR LIFE-AFFIRMING PATH?

AMY A. OLIVER

**ABSTRACT:** This essay begins by juxtaposing Mexican philosophy with world philosophies and philosophy writ large, offers an assessment of salient moments in the history of Mexican philosophy (including indigenous contributions, Sor Juana, anti-positivist thinkers, and innovative philosophical concepts/terms) and suggests their applicability to North American life. The essay concludes by highlighting a few areas that could benefit from ongoing philosophical reflection by Mexicans in an increasingly challenging human rights context.

**Keywords:** Mexican philosophy, Sor Juana, Óscar Guardiola-Rivera, Leopoldo Zea, Octavio Paz, anti-positivism, indigenous, sustainability, center, margin, nobodiness, femicide, border

**RESUMEN:** En este ensayo se ubica la filosofía mexicana en el contexto de la filosofía mundial y la filosofía sin más. Luego plantea un análisis de varios hitos de la filosofía mexicana (los aportes indígenas, Sor Juana, los pensadores antipositivistas y algunos conceptos y términos novedosos) y su aplicabilidad para la vida norteamericana. Se acaba por resaltar algunos temas que exigen la sostenida meditación filosófica por pensadores mexicanos debido al contexto actual que desafía tanto los derechos humanos.

**Palabras clave:** Filosofía mexicana, Sor Juana, Óscar Guardiola-Rivera, Leopoldo Zea, Octavio Paz, antipositivismo, indígena, sostenibilidad, centro, margen, ninguneo, femicidio, frontera

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The term “Mexican philosophy” has been scrutinized for decades from a variety of vantage points, some less sympathetic than others. Some potential readers are reluctant to engage with what they believe are nationalistic philosophies, occasionally rightly assuming that linking nationality to philosophy can be a form of partisanship. A larger framework here is what can be termed a clash between anthropology and philosophy. In that phrasing, anthropology is suspect as being too rooted in specific history. Often, on the other hand, philosophy is presented as a kind of thinking that claims to have escaped the situations of history. Certainly, some famed philosophers have not felt a need to think much about such situations and seem to feel that philosophy can be rendered independent of what history has wrought, without any need to keep up with either current events or revisions of mainstream historical interpretations.

Another intellectual “peril” many commentators have focused on when considering arguments favoring intellectual developments like “Mexican philosophy” is an idea that such philosophical inquiry is, at heart, a kind of politics. Of course, political philosophers are one group, among others, who might not resist this description. For instance, just as many philosophers in Europe responded directly or indirectly to the World Wars, philosophers in Mexico were once acutely aware of the collapse of the Spanish empire in 1898. One result of Spain’s withdrawal was that Mexicans and other Latin Americans essentially were confronted with the responsibility of having to take a stance toward the United States, and it usually was clear that most would not sympathize with a country that would become infamous for dollar diplomacy, big stick diplomacy, and its not very “good neighbor policy.” In addition to the Spanish-American War, memories also have lingered in Mexico of earlier imperialist episodes such as the Mexican-American War, the annexation of Texas, and the loss of a vast amount of Mexican territory, famously including California. There was considerable, deep worry in Mexico and throughout Latin America about the ambitions of the Colossus of the North, yet there was no small amount of fascination with the United States. Such a historical backdrop would give philosophers in Mexico ample opportunity to consider their place in the world and the nature of the philosophy they produced.

My take on Mexican philosophy does not mean a choosing of anthropology over philosophical speculation or discovery. Instead, looking at the ideas presented by many Mexican philosophers, it is clear much of the time that they are wrestling with what Western philosophy has termed fundamental questions, fruitful meditations, or traditionally respected philosophical topics. In other words, even when some Mexican thinkers claim to be opposed to the domination of Western thought, they usually demonstrate respect for certain

thinkers, methods, perspectives, logics, images, arguments, and theses that can be found in much mainstream Western thought and also in famous counterpoints to Western thought, even though still generally expressed within Western culture. That such Mexicans have claimed the very term, “philosopher,” also makes this point.

Historical oppression has often pulled philosophers into political discourse, when less political stances and forms of philosophy were pushed aside and their exploration postponed. National and cultural liberation efforts can be topically or intellectually narrowing even as they are urgent and required. While the danger of partisanship or anthropologically-linked philosophy exists, a national adjective can precede some practices of “philosophy” without falling victim to either.

“Mexican philosophy,” then, can refer to philosophy done by Mexicans, philosophy which deals with issues that Mexicans experience, both, and more. There has been exhaustive and sometimes exhausting debate over whether “Mexican philosophy” refers to philosophy conceived by Mexicans, philosophy that possesses a particular Mexican character, both, or some other criterion, such as a methodological approach. In this essay, I will not revisit that robust debate. Instead, I will place Mexican philosophy above the fray and treat it, in effect, as any other philosophy—situated and contextual.

For example, the category “French feminist philosophers” usually engenders a list of names that would be similar for many serious about modern thought. While a list that comes to mind for one person might be longer than one that another person comes up with, there would still likely be overlap of certain names. That these feminist philosophers are French is less important than that they have produced a significant, well-known body of work, yet their Frenchness is not irrelevant to the philosophy they produce. Crucially, translations of their work into other languages have enabled many in philosophy and allied fields to become familiar with French feminist thinkers. On the other hand, “German philosophers,” perhaps now a less commonly used phrase, would probably not generate the same list of names for everyone. One person might think of Kant, another of Heidegger, the next person of still others, but the German context and linguistic practices of most of these philosophers would not be altogether immaterial. Overall, the historic dominance of German, French, and Greek philosophies, together with their translations into many other languages, means that they are more often referred to simply as “philosophy,” with no adjective needed. Many world philosophies, however, still benefit from an adjective to locate them because they remain comparatively unknown. What most of the lesser-known world philosophies need is for more of their works to be translated into other languages and for philosophers to

become more interested in exploring ideas from outside the traditional Western mainstream. To expand this point, in this essay I will outline the value of pre-Columbian philosophy in Mexico, showcase a few exemplary cases from the post-Conquest, and respectfully suggest some topics for Mexican philosophers going forward.

What is often called “Mexican philosophy” today has for most of its students centuries-old roots in the thought of indigenous precursors. When a foot soldier of Hernán Cortés, Bernal Díaz del Castillo, in *The True History of the Conquest of New Spain* recounts the dramatic moment in 1521 when he first laid eyes on the busy, developed civilization he observed beneath him in the valley of Mexico, we are now aware that philosophy was being done in that valley by some of its people. However, for many years in modernity, much of what we thought we knew about indigenous cultures was incorrect. Many traditionally-trained Latin American area specialists were taught that when it comes to studying the indigenous past of the region, too much crucial information has been lost, sadly, whether through destruction by the Spanish, mysterious extinctions, archeological pillaging, or other means. Therefore, many have been discouraged from serious hope that we would be able to learn anything truly specific and significant about indigenous thinking in Latin America. Recent scholarship significantly challenges this traditional understanding, even as it also cannot recover all that was indeed senselessly destroyed.

To be more precise, there are “new topics” that can be shown to have arisen in Latin American thought and that help make this expansive potential clear.

According to Óscar Guardiola-Rivera, in *What if Latin America Ruled the World? How the South Will Lead the North into the 21st Century*, the relationship between humans and nature was a problem that the indigenous had fruitfully wrestled with long before the *conquistadores* set foot in the New World. As an analogue, we now acknowledge that the indigenous could not be accused of being inexpert at engineering. The purpose of indigenous community projects “was not the glorification of the past, but, rather, the modification of the world for the purposes of creating a future” (Guardiola-Rivera 2013, 29). Guardiola-Rivera highlights the deep spiritual link that existed for the indigenous between nature and the human being (81). For pre-Hispanic civilizations there is an exchange between the two: the human being must offer sacrifices to nature in exchange for nature allowing human beings to take what they need from the natural world. The involved ritual the Aztecs would undertake before they felt they could cut down a tree should make us reconsider what we have usually been taught about the Aztecs. There clearly existed among indigenous cultures a sense of responsibility for the environment that was superseded and shriveled after the arrival of the Spanish.



Guardiola-Rivera repositions Latin America's indigenous peoples in relation to the world they inhabit. As common perception has it, Amerindians are ontologically stuck in a space without time: Nature is a God-like force and must be pleased by way of sacrifices: "these people" failed to hop onto Hegel's train of history. Not so, says Guardiola-Rivera, who argues that this equilibrium of human being and surrounding world has been misunderstood. Nature is not viewed here as a normative force in and of itself, but rather understood "as a common space for the interaction of natural and essentially social forces, framed by changing laws and contingency" (29). Because of this fundamental contingency—and Guardiola-Rivera means it, for he states "there is nothing that exists as a matter of necessity"—human beings have an obligation to behave in a different way than we are accustomed to. Instead, we often assume that we can continue to live in the same ways we have been living. Just as the Amerindians modified vast areas of land to suit a model designed to ensure long-term sustainability of resources, today we must "responsibly create and recreate future environments for the use of all, rather than exhausting them now" (29).

From Guardiola-Rivera's perspective, the oppression of slavery, together with the need to return to community consciousness of collective well being for the future in place of self-destructive gratifications, constituted the backbone of the movements for independence and liberation in Latin America. He writes, "the Indian Wars were an outburst against the destruction of their future environments in the name of short-term gains, which would, ultimately, be disastrous for all.... these rebellions were supported by the desire to create a different future, in which the entire population participated, including women and children" (185). Guardiola-Rivera effectively shows how the knowledge systems of Amerindian civilizations can teach us about sustainable living that is considerate of the community at large, and presupposes the necessity of commons (water, air, certain spaces, etc.) to be available to all.

A somewhat different additional philosophical expansion is James Maffie's *Aztec Philosophy: Understanding a World in Motion* as it provides an in-depth analysis of an original metaphysics developed in Nahua culture, which flourished in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries leading up to 1521. Maffie helpfully unpacks many of the terms required to engage with this metaphysics involving a dynamic reciprocity between humans and the earth, *teotl* and *nepantla* chief among them. The central Nahua problematic involved the question, "How can humans walk in balance and so flourish upon the earth?" (Maffie, 2013, 12) Together with Guardiola-Rivera's analysis, we can appreciate the relevance and timeliness of this question today.

The works of both authors can lead to the notion that a solution to our problems, at least in part, may lie in considering the worldview of groups which

have often been called “uncivilized” or “marginal.” Thinking about the past from the perspective of the vanquished can illuminate present-day problems. For instance, one key historical moment in Latin America, according to Guardiola-Rivera, was the conversion of marginalized populations into beasts of burden, into objects that were “even below slavery,” which resulted in economic and political inequality between colonized and colonizing nations under the guise of progress (177). In the end, the author suggests that the *conquistadores* were the barbarians and savages who disembarked on a continent where progress had not arrived in the form of factories and gunpowder, but instead had arguably been achieved as a sustainable equilibrium between human beings and nature. The “New” World was not so unaccomplished or underdeveloped after all. For those accustomed to reading official histories of Latin America, unexpectedly these authors stress the capacity for agency that marginal groups possessed. This capacity, and other vestiges of pre-Conquest philosophies, can still be seen and are perhaps getting increased, deserved attention.

Post-conquest, in a very important sense, “the view from the margin” remains often insightful and can deepen philosophical appreciations. Because philosophy from the margin has, for many of its practitioners, more reason both to criticize itself and to try to understand all that not being in the center may mean, it can offer perspective not found in philosophies of the center, which have not felt pressured to question their existence or their capacity to produce worthwhile ideas. To expand on Alfonso Reyes’s metaphor, although Mexicans were not invited to the banquet table of Western civilization, they have much to offer. Now that Mexican thinkers have pulled up a chair anyway and claimed a space from which to participate, others would do well to sample what they have to contribute. In recent decades, many key works have been translated into English, making now a good time to explore Mexican ideas.<sup>1</sup>

Mexican philosophy after the Conquest arguably offers insights that can be very useful to people in the United States and elsewhere. Distinguishing among the works of philosophy that have proliferated in Mexico, usually written by Mexicans, but also by others who have made Mexico their home, cannot be the task of a brief essay, but I would like to highlight a few moments in Mexican philosophy that I think may be especially fruitful for readers in the United States.

Juana Inés de la Cruz, a seventeenth-century poet, philosopher, and nun, is an unexpected gem of history, some of whose engaging works fortunately were

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<sup>1</sup> See Zea (1992), Sánchez (2012, 2021), Sánchez and Sanchez (2017), Sánchez and Gallegos (2021), Díaz and Foust (2021).

saved.<sup>2</sup> In “Reply to Sor Philotea,” a philosophical, autobiographical essay written four months before her death in 1695, she compellingly questioned authority (male, religious, and hierarchical) before many in Mexico realized it was possible to think so resistantly. Thoroughly scrutinizing the treatment of women, most of all herself, especially in regard to their right to education, Juana artfully weaponized irony to challenge the powers that be in the colonial Mexico City of her day without them easily being able to accuse her of having communicated explicitly the serious criticisms she carefully lodged between the lines of her essay. Upon sending her epistle, she knowingly assumed the risk of further discipline or even death, though unexpectedly she died of natural causes soon thereafter when a plague swept through her convent.<sup>3</sup>

Fast-forwarding several centuries later, early and mid-twentieth century Mexico offered a unique environment for philosophy. A strong and fruitful reaction against varieties of positivism began before the Mexican Revolution and continued in force afterwards (see Stehn 2013). Members of the *Ateneo de la Juventud*, most notably Antonio Caso and José Vasconcelos, engaged in an intellectual movement that devalued positivism and revalued the humanities, especially metaphysics, classics, and the writings of select European philosophers. Members of *El Grupo Hiperión*, notably Leopoldo Zea, further developed anti-positivist analyses in the 1940s and 1950s.

The anti-positivist philosophical backlash in Mexico has continuing relevance for more than Mexicans. Just as Leopoldo Zea demonstrated how there were interests at work behind the scientific, positivist agenda of the *porfiriato*, and that certain classes benefited while others lost out, we can apply his insights to our experiences today of “data-driven analyses,” “algorithms,” “metrics,” and “best practices,” which may conceal dubious interests that promote these purportedly scientific standards. Similar vestiges of positivistic thinking can be seen in terms like “zero sum game,” “quid pro quo,” “exchange relations,” “quotas,” “objectivity,” “universality,” “value-neutral” claims, and in policies that mandate minima and maxima. In universities, abolishing philosophy departments and other humanities departments has sometimes been explained away in part through positivistic approaches to calculating certain kinds of “outcomes.” Having to defend the National Endowment for the Humanities and the National Endowment for the Arts to protect them from defunding or cancelation has been presented as requiring advocates to demonstrate their utility, which has in fact been done both qualitatively and

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<sup>2</sup> A 4-volume set of her works was published by Fondo de Cultura Económica in 1951. See also Octavio Paz’s biography of Sor Juana (1988).

<sup>3</sup> See the selected works of Sor Juana (2016). See also my essay on irony in “Reply to Sor Philotea” (1988).

quantitatively, but not as easily as the National Institutes of Health is able to justify its existence. Whenever the measurable is put forth as the best or only way to make judgments, philosophers need to challenge. Mexican anti-positivist philosophers offer many models of how to do so.

In addition to the enduring inspiration of Juana Inés de la Cruz and the widespread applicability of anti-positivist perspectives, a Spaniard indirectly contributed to creative philosophical language in Mexico. José Ortega y Gasset, an innovative wordsmith, often developed inventive concepts such as *ensimismamiento* (in-oneself-ness—with a uniquely positive connotation) and *lugarcomunismo* (commonplace-ism). This intellectual tradition encouraged José Gaos, Ortega's student, and other philosophers who came to Mexico after the fall of Republican Spain to call themselves *transterrados* (which signified that they were content to view themselves as transplanted rather than exiled).

In the early 1950s, continuing attention to language contributed to Leopoldo Zea frequently using the term *toma de conciencia* (consciousness-raising), which independently would later become a critical term for the U.S. feminist movement in the 1970s (see MacKinnon 1989). Octavio Paz explored the dehumanizing concept of “nobodiness” in the late 1940s: “I remember the afternoon I heard a noise in the room next to mine, and asked loudly: ‘Who is in there?’ I was answered by the voice of a servant who had recently come to us from her village: ‘No one, señor. I am’” (Paz 1985, 44). Paz goes on to describe how this process works: “Our dissimulation here is a great deal more radical: we change him from somebody into nobody, into nothingness” (45). Coincidentally, in “Letter from Birmingham Jail” (1963), Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. describes a similar phenomenon: “when you are harried by day and haunted by night by the fact that you are a Negro, living constantly at tip-toe stance, never quite knowing what to expect next, and plagued with inner fears and outer resentments; when you are forever fighting a degenerating sense of ‘nobodiness.’”

Leopoldo Zea used the term *latinoamericanismo* to encourage philosophical reflection about the region, and he demonstrated how Mexican philosophy could be considered *filosofía sin más* (a concise phrase to indicate a philosophy without apology, qualification, adjectives attached, or external judgment—simply philosophy). Horacio Cerutti Guldberg writes of *nuestraamericanismo* (named for the spirit embodied in José Martí's famous essay, “Our America”), a call to think from within and address the problems of Latin America in concrete, situated, embodied, conscious, and present ways. *Latinoamericanismo*, *nuestraamericanismo*, and, more specifically, *mexicanidad* help explain how cultural and personal identities can be constructed.

Creative language employed in philosophy that delved into human existence generated unusually rich phenomenological and existential writings during the twentieth century. Certain historical impacts contributed to a unique philosophical context in Mexico. For example, the arrival of José Gaos and other *transterrados* from Spain imported the ideas of José Ortega y Gasset and Miguel de Unamuno beginning in 1939. Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time* was translated into Spanish in 1943, nineteen years before it was published in English. Mexican philosophers enthusiastically studied European philosophers such as Max Scheler, Wilhelm Dilthey, and Nicolai Hartmann, who were less widely read in the United States. These and other factors were advantageous for shaping Mexican approaches to phenomenology and existentialism as they examined issues of felt or alleged inferiority, applicability of classical philosophy to the Mexican situation, the reality of being Mexican, and other related questions.<sup>4</sup>

While the above represents only a sliver of what might be said about Mexico's centuries of salient contributions to philosophy, there is ample reason to watch for continuing insights. Mexico presently offers many themes for philosophy, not many of them pleasant, but most of them fundamental to the human condition.

For example, femicide looms in the context of the Ciudad Juárez murders, where hundreds of women and girls have been murdered since 1993, with no end in sight. Moreover, the killings of women and girls continue throughout Mexico at a current rate of approximately a dozen a day. Protests have taken place following high-profile murders such as those of Fatima Aldrighetti, who was kidnapped and tortured first; Ingrid Escamilla, who was skinned first; and journalist Lourdes Maldonado, who was shot and killed January 23, 2022, as she sat in her car outside her home in Tijuana. Cristina Rivera Garza describes the general situation of disappearance and murder among the entire population in the country as follows:

What we Mexicans have been forced to witness at the beginning of the twenty-first century—on the streets, on pedestrian bridges, on television, or in the papers—is, without a doubt, one of the most chilling spectacles of contemporary horror. Bodies sliced open from end to end, chopped into unrecognizable pieces, left on the streets. Bodies exhumed in a state of decay from hundreds upon hundreds of mass graves. Bodies tossed from pickup trucks onto crowded streets. Bodies burned on enormous pyres. Bodies without hands or without ears or without noses. Disappeared bodies, unable

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<sup>4</sup> For more detail, see Jalif de Bertranou (2010) and Sánchez (2016).

to claim their suitcases from the bus stations where their belongings have arrived. Persecuted bodies, bodies without air, bodies without fingernails or eyelashes. (Rivera Garza 2020, 2)

Response to this horror by government authorities has been underwhelming at best. However, some philosophers have not shied away from trying to understand the meaning of this continuing brutality. Some interpret it as an assault on thinking itself (see Reed-Sandoval 2016; Valencia 2018; Sánchez 2020).

Border issues also invite reflection. Human beings apparently can be “legal” until crossing an international border, when they suddenly can become “illegal,” with far-reaching and sometimes catastrophic consequences. Also, environmental challenges highlight the increasing extent to which North Americans are in this together. Air, water, and wildlife cross borders without regard for boundary markers.<sup>5</sup>

Three additional topics come to mind:

The *mestizo* consciousness and identity constructions of Afro-Mexicans in the Costa Chica region of southwestern Mexico is an area ripe for study.

While considerable commentary exists on the effects of technology on human beings, still more might be offered regarding the effects of lack of access to technology.

A set of contemporary gender issues provides much to contemplate: abortion access, atypical sex anatomy surgical interventions, non-gender-conforming identities, trans rights, conversion therapy, and identity markers for official documentation.

More translations of Mexican philosophical works would be welcome. Among the neediest candidates, I would argue, are Antonio Caso’s *La existencia como economía, como desinterés y como caridad*, a re-translation of *Perfil del hombre y la cultura en México* by Samuel Ramos, as well as his *Hacia un nuevo humanismo*. These are only a beginning.

Mexican philosophy still may still appear marginal from mainstream academic perspectives, but it is not outside the most valuable themes of our lives. Mexican philosophy still may be underappreciated, but it is present and vital to a multigenerational community, and so may continue to be present and helpful to those who seek its illuminations as this century and its crises continue to unfold.

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<sup>5</sup> On philosophical border issues, see Cantú (2019). On philosophical immigration issues, see Mendoza (2017).

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## IF ARISTOTLE HAD COOKED: THE PHILOSOPHY OF SOR JUANA

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**ABSTRACT:** Drawing from a range of her prose, poetic, and theological work, this article focuses on four recurring themes in Sor Juana’s philosophy: a socially situated picture of knowledge production, the social construction of gender, a limited form of skepticism about revisionist theology, and the nature of obedience and self-control. Her treatment of these issues suggests a potentially systematic picture we might call *social fallibilism*, that is, the view that what we can know and do are dependent on somewhat fragile features of both agents and their social and material contexts. It is a prescient picture of human agency, where central features of it—including freedom and knowledge—are always relational in their realization, and chronically vulnerable to defeat.

**Keywords:** Sor Juana, knowledge, standpoint epistemology, gender, social construction, free will, freedom, self-control, theology

**RESUMEN:** A partir de una variedad de su obra en prosa, poética y teológica, este artículo se enfoca en cuatro temas recurrentes en la filosofía de Sor Juana: una noción socialmente situada acerca de la producción de conocimiento, la construcción social del género, una forma limitada de escepticismo sobre la teología revisionista, y la naturaleza de obediencia y dominio propio. Su tratamiento de estos temas sugiere una imagen potencialmente sistemática que podríamos llamar *falibilismo social*, es decir, una posición la cual lo que podemos saber y hacer depende de características un tanto frágiles de ambos agentes al igual que sus contextos sociales y materiales. Es una imagen que anticipa esfuerzos contemporáneos sobre la agencia humana, donde sus características centrales, los cuales incluyen la libertad y el conocimiento, son siempre relacionales en su realización y crónicamente vulnerable a la derrota.

**Palabras clave:** Sor Juana, conocimiento, epistemología del punto de vista, género, construcción social, libre albedrío, libertad, autocontrol, teología

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Juana Ramírez de Asbaje (1648-1695), better known as Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, was a cloistered nun of the Order of Saint Jerome. She was also the most formidable intellect in the Americas during the 17<sup>th</sup> century. She is best known for her poetry, plays, and a handful of letters that set out the case for the education of women and her rights to intellectual freedom. Although the bulk of her writing was creative or religious, her interests spanned science, theology, philosophy, history, and music theory. This essay is an effort to come to grips with some distinctive theses in her work, and to untangle some contemporary interpretive issues about her philosophical commitments.<sup>1</sup>

In what follows, I focus on four threads in Sor Juana's philosophical work: first, her account of the conditions of effective knowledge production; second, her views about gender and social construction; third, an interesting and surprising argument for limited skepticism about the possibility of revisionist theology; and fourth, her remarks on obedience and self-control. Together, these elements suggest distinctive and potentially systematic package of commitments that we might think of as *social fallibilism*, or the view that the kinds of things we know and can do are dependent on somewhat fragile features of agents and their relationship to social and material contexts. This is not a picture where knowledge, learning, self-control, and culpability are understood in terms of individualistic, atomistic, or intrinsic epistemic and moral powers; these central features of human life are always relational and chronically vulnerable to failure. Hers is also Christian picture, but one deeply indebted to Renaissance humanism, yet skeptical about the possibility of overturning traditional tenets of Catholic theology. It is a body of work that is striking in its prescience about contemporary themes in feminist philosophy, standpoint epistemology, and agency.

### 1. The Reply

A ready place to begin with Sor Juana's philosophical contributions is a letter she wrote to the bishop of Puebla, Manuel Fernández de Santa Cruz. The letter

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<sup>1</sup> As Paula Gómez Alonzo (1956) noted, while considerable attention has been paid to Sor Juana's contributions to poetry and literature, there has been substantial neglect of her philosophical views. Although this remains mostly true almost 70 years later, recent efforts to undo some of that neglect include Beuchot (1998: 125-137); Femenías (2005); Aspe (2018); Gallegos-Ordorica (2020); and the Project Vox Team (2021). In Mexico and Latin America more generally, there has been considerable neglect of the work of women philosophers. For a recent discussion of the astonishing erasure of women philosophers in Mexico, see del Rio (2018).

is her “Reply to Sor Filotea,” oftentimes known simply as *Respuesta*, and typically translated into English as “The Answer” or “The Reply.”

The context that led to Sor Juana writing *Respuesta* is a matter dispute among scholars. The disagreement is kept alive by both the limited information we have about the period, the oftentimes indirect manner of Baroque writing made more complicated by Sor Juana’s position as a nun, and the recent and (one hopes) ongoing discovery of more of Sor Juana’s writings (Cf. Paz 1988: 491-5, Soriano Vallès 2014: 49-52; Bénassy-Berling, 2017).

The uncontested facts are these: in 1690 Sor Juana offered some criticisms of an old sermon by a prominent Portuguese Jesuit, Antonio Vieira. Someone asked her to write up her thoughts on the issue, and this document was circulated among the lettered elite of Mexico City. Eventually, and without her permission, Sor Juana’s friend, Manuel Fernández de Santa Cruz (the aforementioned bishop of Puebla), published Sor Juana’s critique of Vieira as the *Carta atenagórica*. That publication also included a pseudonymous letter by Fernández (under the name “Sor Filotea de Santa Cruz”) that praised Sor Juana’s work, while also recommending that she spend more time on theological matters and less time on her more secular writings. A few months later, in 1691, Sor Juana penned *Respuesta*. The argumentation in that letter overlaps with the arguments she made a decade earlier (1681) to another priest, Antonio Núñez de Miranda, when she dismissed him as her confessor (More 2016: 144).

One version of the story, amplified by Octavio Paz’s (1988) influential book *Sor Juana, or the Traps of Faith*, reads these events as the crucifixion of Sor Juana’s intellectual life, one that results in her abandonment of books and letters for more traditional cloistered life. On this telling, Sor Juana was caught between warring religious leaders in the Catholic Church, and was forced to renounce her worldly life, to sell all her books, and to cease to write. A few years later, she died during a pandemic while caring for her sisters in the convent.<sup>2</sup>

What is indisputable is that Sor Juana’s reply to Sor Filotea is a masterpiece of argumentation. Her extended defense of women’s right to education tends to be especially notable for contemporary audiences. Less obvious and less matters of scholarly discussion are a variety of epistemic theses that come up along the

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<sup>2</sup> Subsequent discoveries and academic consensus suggest that things are not so neat as Paz’s narrative suggests. For example, Manuel Fernández de Santa Cruz (the nominal villain in many versions of the story) wrote letters intended for Sor Juana that show no sign of anger at her reply. Other evidence makes it clear that they remained in contact for several years. This information was not widely available at the time Paz and others cemented the standard narrative about the last years of Sor Juana’s life and her “conversion” to a more traditional and non-intellectual form of religious life. For discussion, see Bénassy-Berling (2017: 128-130).

way (more about which, below). Throughout, she is keenly interested in the way social conditions can mitigate or enhance people's culpability, a theme to which she returns throughout her reply. It is a remarkable text from start to finish, an innovative account of knowledge, obedience, and the will that presents itself as an obedient apology all the while attacking the presumptions in the condemnation directed at her.

Part of what makes *Respuesta* such a fascinating document is that Sor Juana carefully avoids framing any of her claims as revolutionary. Where she is innovative, she intentionally characterizes her innovations as extensions of a tradition—frequently Catholic, but often pre-Christian and classical. Moreover, she cautiously avoids claiming that she knows anything, insisting, instead, only that she is an enthusiast of learning: “I do not wish to say . . . that I have been persecuted for knowing, only for loving knowledge and letters” (2016: 107).

Her reply opens by explicitly accepting Fernández's admonition that she direct more of her time to studying spiritual matters. However, she immediately turns to justifying her long history of attention to those profane matters he directed her to avoid. First, she notes that apart from a single poem—“First Dream”—her writing has always been at the request of others. Second, she insists that her impulse to write and to study is a powerful God-given inclination—an impulse oriented toward some proper end. Her efforts to suppress that inclination have been to no avail.

Her effort to signal that she is obeying Fernández's command, and not at fault for having acted otherwise, is presumably bound up in the significance of her status as a nun. In the New Spain of Sor Juana's day—especially after the Council of Trent—the idealized image of a nun involved “holy” or “blessed” ignorance. This picture of religious life was coupled to a view according to which nuns were to be absolutely faithful to commands by church authorities. Indeed, in a doctrinal guide authored by Sor Juana's sometimes confessor, the Jesuit Antonio Núñez de Miranda, nuns were directed to “renounce [their] own will and freedom” (cited in More 2016: 133 n. 2).

This historical context explains why Sor Juana goes to such lengths to illustrate her efforts to suppress these impulses, and to show that she acted on them in a quasi-pathological way. These are not inclinations that she sought. On the contrary, she had “asked Him [God] to dim the light of [her] understanding, leaving only enough for [her] to obey His Law.” Why would she ask for such a thing? Her reply: “anything else is too much in a woman, according to some; there are even those who say it does harm” (2016: 95). One harm was clear: by her lights, attaining fame for her writing did not even entail the customary rewards. Instead, her success as a woman turned her into a special target (2016: 105).

A large portion of *Respuesta* is autobiographical, but its function is to illustrate the scope and depths of her intellectual drive. Because she is at pains to paint her intellectual ambitions as a divinely inspired drive, it is important to her to illustrate that her intellect is in fact well-suited for these studies. Thus, the barriers she encountered in her studies play a dual role: (1) they show that she is apt for learning, as evidenced by the fact that she has learned so much despite these barriers, and (2) they show that this was not a matter of some one-off poorly considered choice, but instead, a fundamental feature of how she was constituted. The import of these recurring features will figure in several aspects of what follows.

## 2. The Social Epistemology of Education

One of the remarkable features of Sor Juana's reply to Fernández ("Sor Filotea") is the picture she paints of the social conditions on knowledge production and transmission, and how far the situation in New Spain was from that ideal. She uses her own experience as an illustration of the problems, but a good deal of her account can be read as identifying issues that continue to matter for educational inequality today.

First, as a woman who was denied access to formal education, her education was limited to what she could wrest from her books, on her own. As she put it, "I learned how difficult it is to study those soulless characters without the living voice and explanations of a teacher" (97). Unguided reading proved to be a poor substitute to formal instruction, she thought.

Second, the denial of formal education didn't just mean that she lacked informed guidance about what to read and about the meaning of texts. It also meant that she lacked peers with whom to confer about the various subject matters she sought to learn and with whom to practice and develop intellectual skills.

Third, it is easier to learn if one has a room of one's own. She had little interest in a marriage and the convent seemed to provide a better place to pursue her interests. Even so, the ordinary demands of convent life were hardly conducive to efficient learning (102). Freedom from interruption matters.

Fourth, material conditions of effective knowledge transmission require access to the relevant texts. Her own haphazard education reflected the accidents of which books were available, and not her interests or what might have been a more sensibly organized education (100).

Despite the disadvantages she faced with respect to the social and material conditions conducive to learning and producing knowledge, she did think that she had made an important discovery. In formal and speculative areas (as opposed to the technical arts), spreading out one's efforts and attentions across

subject matters has important advantages, “for one subject illuminates and opens a path in another by means of variations and hidden connections . . . so that it seems they correspond and are joined with admirable unity and harmony” (101). Consequently, a narrow education produces an impoverished understanding. Her own case, she says, is that knowledge of diverse disciplines has what we might now think of as a kind of network effect: the more subjects she learned, the more she could readily learn new subjects.

The more general implication, though, is that one achieves a better understanding of God’s creation by ranging widely over it. This thought has echoes of the Ignatian injunction to “find God in all things.” Sor Juana—well familiar with Jesuit thought in the 17<sup>th</sup> century—returns to this theme in several places. In perhaps the most paradigmatic passage in this spirit, she notes that even when she was prohibited from book learning for a time, she found that she still could study the world, and that her “book was the entire mechanism of the universe” (108). Everyday life provides plenty of opportunities for reflection about topics as diverse as the origin of the varieties of intelligence, the variations in tempers, the nature of optical perspective, whether there are patterns in the way tops move, and the recurring presence of geometric shapes in nature (108-9).

All of this is a prelude to one of the most interesting aspects of Sor Juana’s discussion: the effects of an epistemic world structured by gender. As Sor Juana sees it, there are things that men cannot and will not know, because gender roles partition the possibility of certain kinds of knowledge. The way institutions of knowledge production and knowledge dissemination are structured along gender lines means that we are doing a poor job of learning and teaching all that there is to know, and thus, we do violence to our own understanding of the world (and correspondingly, God’s construction of it).

Here’s how Sor Juana puts it:

And what could I tell you, señora, about the natural secrets I have discovered when cooking? Seeing that an egg set and fries in butter or oil but falls apart in syrup; seeing that for sugar to remain liquid it is enough to add a very small amount of water in which a quince or other bitter fruit has been placed . . . what can we women know but kitchen philosophies? As Lupercio Leonardo so wisely said, one can philosophize very well and prepare supper. And seeing these minor details, I say that if Aristotle had cooked, he would have written a great deal more. (110)

The force of this point is hard for the modern reader to miss. More than simply putting herself in a tradition with Aristotle, she is pressing the claim that in a world ordered by gender, the unity of knowledge becomes fractured by gender. In a world in which gender structures access to knowledge, everyone is made an inferior knower, unable to escape this partitioning of knowledge.

Do things have to be that way? No, she thinks, at least not to the extent to which it was in her time. More epistemically egalitarian arrangements were possible. She argues that women could be given a more prominent role in a variety of intellect-dependent domains. We would be better off, she thinks, if “older women were as learned as Leta” (115). She recognizes that in her social context, people might have protested that there is scant evidence that, apart from Sor Juana herself, women were readily capable of developing their intellects in this way. So, she offers a veritable catalog of classical and Christian women who achieved success in law and learning.

The persistent fact of a gendered world and the restriction of education to men caused ongoing damage to the transmission and achievement of knowledge. It also put terrible psychological burdens on women subjected to this regime. She notes that the most hurtful attacks on her learning and intellect were not from open enemies, but from those who earnestly thought that “she will surely be lost, and at such heights her own perspicacity and wit are bound to make her vain” (103). It was friends and those who genuinely wished her well who sowed the most doubt about the value of her studies, and the supposedly virtue-destroying effects of them. It is not quite gaslighting in the contemporary sense of the term—that is, the manipulation of a person by implying their sanity is in doubt—but the reactions she encountered are part of a family of agency-corroding social attitudes that invite their targets to self-doubt.

An important part of the picture is Sor Juana’s commitment to the idea of the rationality of women. In *Respuesta*, the case for women’s rationality and suitability for education is made largely by appeal to other instances, thereby implying a buried history of women’s contributions.

However, Sor Juana’s broader picture of the intellect is that its rational powers are not sexed, even if bodies and social worlds are. This idea appears in several places throughout her work. It is a widely recognized feature of the structure of “First Dream,” in which the narrator’s intellect is effectively unmarked by the gendered pronouns of Spanish. This changes at the end of the poem, when the narrator is waking up, with the pronoun becoming female as the mind and body re-integrate. It is also made explicit in her earlier letter to Núñez de Miranda:

But who has forbidden women from private and individual study? Do they not have rational souls just as men? Why should they not also enjoy the privilege of enlightenment through letters? Is her soul not as capable of divine grace and glory as his? If it is, why is hers not also capable of receiving learning and knowledge, which are lesser gifts? What divine revelation, what Church policy, what reasonable verdict could have made such a severe law only for women? (2016: 148)

She sounds this note towards the end of her letter to Fernández, arguing that there was no crime in her critique of Vieira's sermon because (a) the Church does not forbid her expressing her opinion, (b) Vieira was in conflict with established Church authorities, and most relevant to our purposes, (c) "Is not my understanding, such as it is, as free as his, for it comes from the same soil?" (119).

### **3. The Social Construction of Agency**

Although *Respuesta* is perhaps Sor Juana's most explicit defense of women's right to learn and the social epistemology of intellectual life, we would be remiss to neglect some of her other remarks on the social construction of psychological dispositions, and the way social expectations create a double-bind for women.<sup>3</sup> Although these views surface in some of her prose writings, they are most visible in her poetic work. Redondilla 92 is justly regarded as a highlight on this score. (Her poetry, it is worth noting, is frequently untitled, apart from the form and number it was given in her collected works.)<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> For present purposes, we can hold that something is socially constructed if its status or nature is defined or produced by social practices, social meanings, or norms and expectations about the thing in question.

<sup>4</sup> Those familiar with the history of Western philosophy will already know that philosophy can be found in diverse genres and forms of expression. Sor Juana's intellectual milieu and modes of expression are obviously different from our own, but effective all the same. The challenge for the contemporary reader is not that one can't do philosophy in letters and in poetry, but rather, that Sor Juana used all the forms of expression available to her as occasions for philosophy. For example, translator Michael McGaha has observed that Sor Juana's theater works—typically understood as primarily artistic and not philosophical—are exceptionally difficult to translate precisely because they are "a theater of ideas rather than action . . . [for example,] *Pawns of a House* contains numerous scenes that can best be described as staged debates in which the various characters flaunt their command of Aristotelian and Scholastic reasoning as they attempt to score points off one another" (2007, xi-xii).



We'll limit our attention to three ideas in this poem: (1) the thought that social expectations create real dispositions in people; (2) the idea of a pervasive double-bind in women's gender roles; and (3) in the case of gender our norms for how we assign culpability reflect social power, and not the underlying moral faults.

First, she identifies the role that the expectations of men play in the construction of women's dispositions and behavior [English translation from Grossman; pp. 20-22; Spanish from *Obras Completas I* (2009: 320-322)]:

O foolish men who accuse women with so little cause, not seeing you are the reason for the very thing you blame:	Hombres necios que acusáis a la mujer sin razón sin ver que sois la ocasión de lo mismo que culpáis:
for if with unequaled longing you solicit their disdain, why wish them to behave well when you urge them on to evil?	si con ansia sin igual solicitáis su desdén ¿por qué queréis que obren bien si las incitáis al mal?
...	...
The audacity of your mad belief resembles that of the child who devises a monster and then afterward fears it.	Parecer quiere el denuedo de vuestro parecer loco al niño que pone el coco y luego le tiene miedo.
....	...
Love them for what you can make them or make them what you can love.	Queredlas cual las hacéis o hacedlas cual las buscáis.

We don't know the exact date of the composition of the poem, apart from the fact that it was written in the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, which is to say, more than a century before Wollstonecraft, Harriet and John Stuart Mill—among other canonical English-language figures—began to articulate a systematic defense of feminism.<sup>5</sup> The implication of these passages is clear: women's putative nature is the product of male-produced social expectations, specifically, the dual expectations of sexual access and upright morals.

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<sup>5</sup> In the spirit of Sor Juana's emphasis on there being a long-standing but buried history of women intellectuals, it is worth noting that any more complete history of feminist thought in Europe would need to include Mary Astell (an English contemporary of Sor Juana's) and Christine de Pizan in the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

Central to Sor Juana's diagnosis is the idea that women are faced with a double-bind. No matter what they choose—chastity or sexual activity—they will be condemned by their suitors.

You think highly of no woman,  
no matter how modest: if she  
rejects you she is ungrateful,  
and if she accepts, unchaste.

Opinión, ninguna gana;  
pues la que más se recata,  
si no os admite, es ingrata,  
y si os admite, es liviana

This fact gives the lie to the way operative social norms assign guilt. Women bear the entirety of moral condemnation for whatever they choose. In contrast, men are largely left untouched by condemnation.

Who carries the greater guilt  
in a passion gone astray:  
the woman, beseeched, who falls,  
or the man who begged her to yield?

¿Cuál mayor culpa ha tenido  
en una pasión errada:  
la que cae de rogada,  
o el que ruega de caído?

Or which one merits more blame  
although both deserve our censure:  
the woman who sins for pay,  
or the man who pays to sin?

¿O cuál es más de culpar,  
aunque cualquiera mal haga:  
la que peca por la paga,  
o el que paga por pecar?

But why are you so alarmed  
by the guilt you plainly deserve?

Pues ¿para qué os espantáis  
de la culpa que tenéis?

This situation is manifestly unjust. Men have created the double-bind and they enforce it. Although men are the ones paying for prostitution, women are the ones who pay the social costs. Given that men enjoy greater social power, the putatively condemnable choices of women are in an important sense morally rigged choices. Although all prostitution is condemnable, the bulk of the guilt should be placed on men who create the demand and social conditions under which prostitution flourishes.

Although Sor Juana is focused on the specific case of women in 17<sup>th</sup> century New Spain, the basic structure of her analysis generalizes: we should be alert to social circumstances in which subordinated populations face choices in which all options are stigmatized; and in such cases, we do well to direct our attention to the social expectations and conditions that produce forced choices between stigmatized options.

Sor Juana is not interested in denying all agency in women: she is prepared to find fault in the behavior of women. Even so, that fault is mitigated in socially subordinated populations when the guilt-producing conditions are knowingly produced by a dominant population, or where the culpable behavior is a product of persistent enticement.

The idea that social practices and social expectations produce self-fulfilling prophecies about people's capacities is an interesting and important one. Sor Juana's focus is on gender, but the idea taps into an old debate about the nature of human beings and how they are made—a debate that, in the Latin American context, is at least as old as the Las Casas/Sepúlveda debate. Sor Juana doesn't stop with the observation that expectations can produce capacities, though. Instead, she notes the possibility that we can do better, that we can improve ourselves by focusing less on the condemnation of individuals and more on the social practices that make people that way: "Love them for what you can make them/or make them what you can love" [Queredlas cual las hacéis/o hacedlas cual las buscáis (322)].<sup>6</sup>

Stepping back from the details, Sor Juana's anticipation of later feminist thought is expansive. It includes a defense of women's education, a strong commitment to the fundamental rationality of women and the social construction of women's manifested dispositions, an emphasis on the need for social conditions that enable learning, sensitivity to the epistemic costs of a gendered world, the idea of something akin to gaslighting, and the thought of a buried history of women's contributions.

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<sup>6</sup> There is more to say about these themes in Sor Juana's work, and more places where her poetry has manifestly philosophical content. In particular, "First Dream" offers an especially rich and suggestive account of the intellect, and the knowing power of the human mind, but the complexity of that work exceeds the scope of this essay. Several readers have found passages in "First Dream" especially suggestive of Cartesian skepticism, mechanistic philosophy, and aspects of Descartes' *Discourse on the Method*, and if that is right, this would complicate the standard narrative about when, how, and the extent to which the Catholic parts of the Americas came to wrestle with philosophical modernity. There is reason to think that Sor Juana's friend, Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora, had some familiarity with Descartes' works (Cf. Paz 1988: 123). However, Descartes' texts weren't formally permitted in New Spain, and a nun subject to the Inquisition may not have kept such books even if she had access to them. Whether and to what extent Sor Juana was familiar with the work of Descartes is unclear, with commentators sharply diverging on this issue and its influence in her work. Aspe (2018: 54, 75, 88) and Leonard (182-183) are cautiously optimistic about Descartes' influence on "The Dream"; Paz (1988: 375) and Gaos (1960: 65) are dismissive; others (More 2015) are undecided.

#### 4. The Limits of Theology

Feminist elements in Sor Juana's thought are comparatively familiar and important themes in her work. However, the contemporary literature has mostly ignore an intriguing set of theological theses to which we now turn. The first thesis concerns the demandingness of theology on human knowledge and its apparently impossible to satisfy conditions; the second concerns the nature of freedom within contexts where that freedom can and will be misused. We begin with the theologian's plight.

Sor Juana is skeptical about the quality of most then-contemporary theological work. An oft-cited passage in Sor Juana's reply to Sor Filotea turns a traditional argument against women's study (that they are insufficiently learned and virtuous) into an argument that interpretation of Scripture shouldn't be pursued by most men either. She remarks that the interpretation of Scripture by men is akin to putting "a sword in the hand of a madman" (113). Worse, the fact that men are educated makes them more confident and prone to error. Better that they remain ignorant, she thinks, because "a fool becomes perfect (if foolishness can reach perfection) by studying his bit of philosophy and theology and having some idea of languages, making him a fool in many sciences and many languages" (113).

This bit of pointed skepticism directed at the male theologians of her day is not an isolated remark. She objects that people don't approach philosophy and theology in a suitably circumspect fashion. Work on these topics is too often propelled by ego and ambition and done without sensitivity to one's epistemic shortcomings. She notes that "if all of us . . . would take the measure of our talent before studying and (what is worse) writing . . . how little ambition would we have left and how many errors would we have avoided and how many twisted intelligences would we not have in this world!" (114). However, carefully woven throughout the text is a suggestion of a much more interesting and subtle critique of theology. To see how that critique goes, we must return to the beginning of *Respuesta*.

Recall that the initial task of *Respuesta* is to explain why she hadn't spent more of her time working directly on theological matters. Here's what she says: "I proceeded, always directing the steps of my study to the summit of sacred theology, as I have said; and to reach it, I thought it necessary to ascend by the step of human sciences and arts, because how is one to understand the style of the queen of the sciences without knowing that of the handmaidens?" (98). She goes on to argue that logic, rhetoric, physics, arithmetic, geometry, architecture, history, and law, as well as foreign customs, the early Church fathers, music, astronomy, and the mechanical arts, are all necessary preliminaries to the study of theology.

Here's the upshot, though, of her explanation of her study of so many subject matters that are not theology:

[theology] is the book that encompasses all books, and the science that includes all sciences, which are useful for its understanding: even after learning all of them (which clearly is not easy, or even possible), another consideration demands more than all that has been said, and that is constant prayer and purity in one's life, in order to implore God for the purification of the spirit and enlightenment of the mind necessary for comprehending these lofty matters; if this is lacking, the rest is useless. (100)

Of special interest to us is her parenthetical remark. The remark suggests the *impossibility* of learning all the things required to pursue theology. This is striking. The tacit but seemingly inevitable conclusion—one that is generally unremarked upon—is that it may not even be possible for *anyone* to undertake theology, and that to the extent to which one has failed to master the subordinate sciences, one is likely to have an impaired understanding of theological matters.

Interestingly, this tacit conclusion dovetails with aspects of her poem “First Dream,” which was written no more than two years before (recall: it was the only work Sor Juana claims to have written purely for herself). “First Dream” recounts a disembodied dreamer's efforts to secure knowledge via intuition and the method of discourse. Neither approach succeeds. When the intellect gazes at the entirety of creation, that creation “appeared clear and possible/to the eye but not the understanding, which/ (stunned by a glut of objects, its power far exceeded by their grandeur)/retroceded, a coward” (55). Later, she maintains that “if before/a single object knowledge flees, and reason,/a coward, turns away; . . . /it fears it will understand it/ badly, or never, or late,/ how could it reflect on so fearsome and vast/a mechanism, its weight/terrible, unbearable . . .” (62).

Although commentators disagree about how far these skeptical threads extend, the ending of the poem appears intentionally ambiguous. Daybreak illuminates the physical world “with a more certain light” than could be secured by the vaulting ambition of intuition and discourse's efforts at foundational metaphysics and theology (66). Her picture seems to be that foundational knowledge of the sort aspired to by philosophers and theologians encounters a complexity that outstrips the human ability to know.

Skeptical threads aren't limited to her reply to Sor Filotea or “First Dream.” Consider Ballad 2:

All people have opinions  
and judgements so multitudinous,  
that when one states this is black,  
the other proves it is white.

. . . . A proof is found for everything,  
a reason on which to base it;  
and nothing has a good reason  
since there is reason for so much.

. . . .  
there is no one who can decide  
which argument is true and right.

Since no one can adjudicate,  
why do you think, mistakenly,  
that God entrusted you alone  
with the decision in this case?  
(transl. Grossman 2016: 6-7)

Todo el mundo es opiniones  
de pareceres tan varios,  
que lo que el uno que es negro,  
el otro prueba que es blanco

Para todo se halla prueba  
y razón en que fundarlo;  
y ni hay razón para nada  
de haber razón para tanto

. . . .  
no hay quien pueda decidir  
cuál es lo más acertado

Pues, si no hay quien lo sentencie,  
¿por qué pensáis vos, errado,  
que os cometió Dios a vos  
la decisión de los casos?  
(2009, pp. 10-11)

Read together, these passages cast new light on another passage in *Respuesta*. At the outset of her reply to Fernández, immediately after explaining why she had focused on profane matters (because the stakes were laughter or mockery, as opposed to the attentions of the Inquisition), she goes on to note that her critics have maintained that she has “no aptitude for being correct” (94). In the sentence that follows, she suggests that on artistic matters there is no possibility of getting things right or wrong, but then, quoting canon law, she cryptically notes that *no one is obliged to undertake impossible things* (95).

One way of reading that passage is that she is simply saying that it is impossible to be right or wrong about artistic matters. That’s not obviously true, though, and it isn’t clear why avoiding heresies in art is an impossible command to fulfill. The passage is ambiguous, though. A different reading emphasizes that the stakes are her suitability for theological reflection, and that her erroneousness in art is even more so in theology. This remark is in keeping with her rhetorical inclination to turn gendered expectations back on themselves. She can hardly be condemned for not pursuing what is impossible for a woman to do. However, this reading suggests that she may be making a more oblique gesture to an argument that she repeatedly implies but never directly asserts, namely, that she cannot be obligated to do *theology* because there is something impossible about it. This is something notably stronger than a declaration of

epistemic humility. It suggests a kind of task, or perhaps a kind of achievement, that is in some deep way closed off to her.

We can't be confident that this is what she is intending to imply. The structure of baroque writing, norms of indirectness, her particular social position, and her explicit concerns about the Inquisition all weigh against her making a direct and radical an assertion of this kind. Yet, the components of this radical idea are a recurring theme in her work, and the shape of it does not seem to be the weaker idea that theology is merely difficult for her and her contemporaries to do. Repeatedly, she emphasizes the impossibility of mastering the knowledge required for people of her time to do theology at all.

So, is Sor Juana rejecting the possibility of doing any theology? Maybe, but there is ample reason to think that, on pain of contradiction, this cannot be what Sor Juana has in mind. After all, it is hard to say what the *Carta atenagórica* is, if not a work of theology. There, and in *Respuesta*, her defenses of classical theological views—and especially of early Church fathers, seem earnest. So, perhaps her claims about the impossibility of contemporary contributions to theology are best construed as claims that *we*, as opposed to those earlier figures, cannot contribute to a *revisionist* theology. That is, that contemporary philosophers and theologians cannot revise or significantly add to established theology, at least not without first succeeding in the apparently impossible task of learning all the subordinate forms of knowledge.

Why, then, were early Church fathers, and a handful of exceptional theologians in prior ages capable of doing original, foundational theology? Given that the impossibility of so doing seems to depend on the impossibility of mastering its prerequisite knowledge, those prior figures either had to be able to do the impossible or they had some basis for bypassing the knowledge requirement that burdens theology in Sor Juana's time. Perhaps it was a matter of proximity to the age of Christ, their exceptional virtue, or some revelatory gift. Perhaps it was sheer luck in imperfectly warranted human reasoning that only the Church and its tradition could eventually come to recognize as true. Sor Juana never says.

Sor Juana's skepticism about theology was not skepticism about knowledge in general. Sor Juana seems confident about the knowing powers of the human mind, and the value of studying the natural world. But the book of nature is too big for any one person to read in a lifetime. Thus, theological innovation must remain elusive. The most we can hope to do is to recover forgotten aspects of the tradition (as she does in her genealogy of women's role in the Church), or, more cautiously, to realize the full force of already existing insights, as we are about to see in her *Carta atenagórica*.

## 5. Love and Freedom

An important reason for thinking that Sor Juana doesn't reject the possibility of all theology is her own efforts at it in a lengthy letter known as the *Carta atenagórica* (originally published in 1690).<sup>7</sup> The prominence of the *Carta* in the secondary literature on Sor Juana tends to derive from its role in her life story. It was the *Carta atenagórica* that led to the Bishop of Puebla, Manuel Fernández de Santa Cruz's publicly urging Sor Juana to focus less on worldly things, and more on theology, which in turn provoked her penning *Respuesta*. Despite the relatively narrow focus of the issues in the *Carta*, and its central relevance to interpretive questions about Sor Juana's views on theology, the letter contains a good deal of interest even to philosophers who are indifferent or worse to theological matters. Among the rewards are an interesting discussion of freedom, an intriguing account of the moral psychology of being oriented to the good, and her identification of a distinctive notion of "negative" benefits.

The letter concerns competing views about the greatest demonstration of God's love for humans, and the central concern of the letter is a critique of a sermon given by the then-prominent Jesuit priest António Vieira. Throughout, Sor Juana comes across as measured and incensed in equal measure. According to Sor Juana, Vieira's nigh unforgivable error was in holding that the greatest demonstration of Christ's love [a *fineza*, in the language of the time] was not his death, as St. Augustine held, but his physical presence that followed his death. (The basis of Vieira's claim was that Christ's resurrection happened only once, but his presence in the Eucharist—and thus, the ending of his absence—is continuously performed in the Catholic mass.) She implies that God is using her, a woman, as a special instrument to punish Vieira, because he had the temerity to think he could do better than Augustine, Aquinas, and Chrysostom on the question of what most demonstrated God's love (2005: 244).

Sor Juana opens with a distinction in two metrics for how to measure the greatness of a demonstration of love: "The first (*a quo*) concerns the one who demonstrates love; the second (*ad quem*) the one who receives the demonstration of love. The first measures the greatness of a demonstration of love based on the cost to the lover, the second based on the benefit that accrues to the beloved" (223). On her account, Christ's death is of maximal significance as a demonstration of his love on both fronts: it is the costliest to him and of the greatest benefit for us. It is not enough for Sor Juana to go after Vieira's central

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<sup>7</sup> There is disagreement about whether the *Carta atenagórica* or "Athenagoric Letter" has this title as a reference to Athena (the Greek goddess associated with wisdom and just warfare) or instead, Athenagoras, an early Christian and anti-Pagan apologist. For discussion, see Wray (2017: 137 n. 1)



claim, she also takes issues with various secondary claims, including Vieira's assertion that Christ sought to love without desiring corresponding love from us in return. She thinks this claim is textually indefensible (233-237), and she insists that although Christ didn't need our love, he did demand it (239). The central issue then becomes the question of why Christ would demand that we reciprocate his love even if he doesn't need to be loved by us.

Sor Juana's position on this point is subtle, and it has been misunderstood by some commentators. For example, Octavio Paz suggests that the problem of why Christ wants his love reciprocated is rooted in "an impenetrable mystery," namely, the dual nature of Christ, as both man and God (1988: 393). Paz thinks that it is the human part that needs love to be reciprocated, and he goes on to assert that Sor Juana's reasoning is "more subtle than solid" (393). He concludes that, in the end, "Sor Juana does not answer the terrible question: why does Christ desire to be loved by man?" (394). In his judgment, Sor Juana comes to a contradiction no better than the one she objects to in Vieira.

Paz's reading of the *Carta* mischaracterizes several important features of the *Carta*. For example, Sor Juana explicitly rejects Paz's framing of the issue, namely that the difficulty is in reconciling the dual nature of Christ. Instead, she maintains that "Christ's love is very different from ours" (2005: 239), and she regards it as a central task of the *Carta* to explain how. Paz asserts that Sor Juana avoids answering the question of why Christ wanted his love for humans to be reciprocated. However, she's explicit about her answer: "Christ wants both the love he has for us and the benefit of our love for him all for our sakes" (240). It is a selfless love because Christ receives nothing from it. In contrast, humans receive benefits from loving Christ. Her argument for this claim is an intriguing bit of moral psychology.

First, Sor Juana thinks there is an important good for human-to-human relations that flows from loving God. If humans love God, then they will be called to respect his precepts, including the requirement that people love each other *as God loves them*—that is, with infinite love (240). So, the Christian injunction to love one's neighbor as oneself gets additional motivational force that is parasitic on the Christian's prior of love of Christ.<sup>8</sup> At the same time, her picture seems to be that this fact—about how the love of a fellow human is a product of an antecedent love of God—helps amplify or reinforce the Christian's love for God. The result is a kind of reverberating, multi-lateral, mutually reinforcing commitment to others and to God.

Second, and perhaps more centrally, Sor Juana thinks that "loving [God] is our supreme good" (240). This is what makes it possible for God's wanting us to

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<sup>8</sup> This has also been emphasized in unpublished work by Sofia Ortiz-Hinojosa.

love him be selfless. Although Sor Juana doesn't put it exactly this way, the idea is roughly analogous to a parent wanting her child to love her, not out of the parent wanting to be loved, but out of a concern for how destructive it would be for the child to not be in a healthy, loving relationship with a parent. Finally, and importantly, the injunction to love God provides a master norm about how orient one's psychology. On her picture, obeying that norm enables one's achievement of the good, even though humans are free to disobey the norm.<sup>9</sup>

One might protest that if God loves us, but doesn't need us to love him, then why does he bother with the command to love him? Why couldn't he just make us so that we necessarily love him, and each other, if that love is so important? Here, free will makes its foreordained entrance. It is a distinctive power of humans, but more importantly in this context, it is a mark of God's love for humans. On this point, Paz rightly characterizes Sor Juana's commitments: "The love of God does not deny but intensifies human liberty: because of his love of man, God has made man free" (394). As she understands it, free will is "the power with which we can choose to do good or evil" (240).<sup>10</sup> The only way God can respect the freedom he has given us, Sor Juana thinks, is to allow us to choose evil. However, it would be cruel to do this without providing us with

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<sup>9</sup> Notice that one can go in for a secularized version of this view, according to which the highest human good is found in the moral law, such that our acting out of love for the moral law has benefits for us quite apart from whether the moral law is indifferent about us. One might insist that such a view has all the same benefits without the theology: love for the moral law produces in us a deeper commitment to our fellow human beings, so love for morality can provide a unifying and enabling feature for the possibility of moral equality. Perhaps Kantian ethics can be understood as animating by something like this thought. Notice, though, that secularizing the view plausibly comes at a cost to motivational efficacy. Love for a concrete person is typically more inspiring and motivating than love for an imperative or other bit of abstracta.

<sup>10</sup> The Kirk Rappaport translation has *free will* characterized as "the power to desire or not to desire to do good or evil," omitting the Spanish construction's implication that free will is a further thing ("with which" or "con que") that has this power, as opposed to free will just being that power. ["Dios dio al hombre libre albedrío con que puede querer y no querer obrar bien o mal" (1957: 431)]. Another reason to not render this in terms of a power to desire is that the use of 'querer' in Sor Juana's context had a different connotation than the English-language 'desire'. There, 'querer' implies mediation by reason or the intellect, in a sense that suggests that it is closer to 'judge' or even 'intend'. I've rendered it as "choose" to signal the idea that what is happening here is understood as rationally mediated, and not there mere product of appetite or desire as understood in the sentimentalist tradition. Thanks to Clinton Tolley for convincing me of the foregoing.

guidance about how to secure that good. That is why he gives us the injunction to love him.

So, Sor Juana's argument doesn't leave us with a "contradiction" (394) or an "impenetrable mystery" (393), as Paz wrongly asserts. Instead, she offers a careful story about how an injunction to love God is entirely explicable in terms of human goods and how they are structured given the fact of human freedom.

There is one more element of this letter for us to consider: Sor Juana's original positive view at the end of the *Carta*. She argues that the greatest gift or demonstration of God's love for us is what she calls *negative benefits*, or "the benefits that he omits bestowing" (2005: 244). She is careful to frame this not as a competitor to the view of Augustine (or what she regards as the correlative views of Aquinas and Chrysostom). Those are views about God in the person of Jesus, whereas her proposal is about God as God, "continual and everlasting" (244). This distinction is important for understanding why Sor Juana doesn't think she conflicts with Augustine, Aquinas, and Chrysostom. Recall: she roundly condemned Vieira for thinking he could do better than them. They were offering an account of the person of *Christ's* demonstration of love; exploiting Catholic distinctions between trinitarian persons and the nature of God as singular substance, Sor Juana's account is of God the creator's *fineza*.

Sor Juana's view is that when God withholds greater benefits from us, it is because (1) we will use them to our own detriment (245); (2) we would be ungrateful (245); and (3) perhaps more generally, we would have trouble reciprocating (244). As she sees it, "God represses the torrents of his immense generosity, restrains the sea of his infinite love, and holds back the flow of his absolute power. . . . [I]t takes more effort for God not to grant us benefits than to grant us benefits. As a result, it is a greater demonstration of God's love to suspend them than to grant them, since God refrains the generosity of his nature, so that we not be ungrateful" (2005: 245). She goes on to argue that there is textual support for thinking God is concerned to limit our opportunities to commit greater sins, and that it is beneficial to not grant us benefits when they will be used badly (247). In short, God does us the favor of not spoiling us.<sup>11</sup>

This way of reading the *Carta* conflicts with the picture advanced by Virginia Aspe (2018) in her recent book on Sor Juana's account of freedom.

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<sup>11</sup> What is this gift's cost to God? Recall that the greatness of a demonstration of love is based, in part, on the cost to the lover and not just what accrues to the beloved (223). Sor Juana's is unclear on this point, although her framing of this in terms of the effortfulness of not giving benefits, and God "restraining the sea of his infinite love" suggests that she thinks there is a kind of cost there. So, roughly, it is costly to the parent to not spoil the child. Thanks to Joseph Martinez for raising this question.

According to her reading of Sor Juana, “the greatest [demonstration] of love that God has bestowed on man is freedom” (2018: 78; Cf. 106). Aspe is surely right that freedom is central to a good deal of Sor Juana’s thought. Moreover, her discussion of Molinist influences in “The Dream” is instructive, suggesting a libertarian picture of free will that rejects important forms of divine foreknowledge. However, the argument of the *Carta* maintains that God is choosing conditions that *enable us* to use our freedom well. That’s the point about negative benefits: it is a gift of providing us with conditions where we are less prone to use our freedom poorly. It is not the claim that God is ensuring that we have free will (as opposed to not having free will).

Aspe seems to understand the idea of negative benefits as the idea of freedom-ensuring non-interference (2018: 84, 93-4). For Sor Juana, though, the issue isn’t the preservation of our freedom. She takes freedom as a given and characterizes it in a way that makes it hard to see why benefits (of a positive or negative way) would affect that freedom. As we’ve seen, for Sor Juana, free will is the power with which we can choose to do good or evil (see n.10 for translation details; Sor Juana *Obras* IV, 794; Cf. 2005: 240). That power would not go away if God intervened to bestow any number of greater gifts on human beings. So, the gift of negative benefits can’t simply be the gift of free will.

What then are the negative benefits? They are strategic withholding of some goods, for example, greater good health and the graces God gives others, as in her examples. What makes the negative benefits significant is precisely that, *given our freedom*, the greater benefits that we desire would both be ill-used and unappreciated. Either would be sufficient to make us worse off, morally speaking. (Notice that if Aspe is right about Sor Juana’s Molinism, God would know this because he would know all future contingents.) So, Sor Juana’s picture is better understood as holding that our disposition to badly use our freedom requires explicit guidance (e.g., in the injunction to love God, as in Christ’s demonstration) and it requires some withholding of benefits to our choice-making dispositions (e.g., in not giving us all the benefits we could want).

Sor Juana’s account of negative benefits is, so far as I know, an original one within the intellectual tradition in which she worked. For those interested in questions about philosophical theology, it offers some tantalizing possibilities for making use of this argument in other contexts. Examples may include the possibility of novel ways to address the problem of evil and novel ways of addressing the problem of divine hiddenness (roughly, the puzzle about why an all-loving and all-powerful God would leave room for human doubt). In either case, one might imagine a defense that leans on the idea that an infinite loving being interested in the welfare of humans might provide negative benefits—

benefits of non-intervention—precisely because of awareness about how we use our freedom.

## 6. Self-control

We have seen how Sor Juana had a complex picture of the social dimensions of agency and the nature of freedom. How do these things interact with possibility of self-control and a nun's commitment to obedience? In a recent essay, Sergio Gallegos-Ordorica (2020) argues that Sor Juana's discussion in *Respuesta* relies on a distinction between a general ability of having control, and the successful exercise of that ability such that one is a self-controlled person. He goes on to argue that Sor Juana has the general ability of being self-controlled, but is not in fact a self-controlled person because, in relevant circumstances, she fails to manage her motives contrary to her better judgment (2020: 6-7).

This is a suggestive picture of Sor Juana's discussion in *Respuesta* but it raises new puzzles. One can possess a general capacity, without it being exercised, manifested, or successful in its performance in each instance. A person might be able to speak Nahuatl, but not do so now, out of reluctance, or on account of being asleep, or because her mouth has been anesthetized for oral surgery. None of these conditions speak against the more general ability to speak Nahuatl. However, the evidence for having a capacity is usually found in occasions of successful exercise. If we read Sor Juana as *never* exercising that capacity—she is not a self-controlled person, on Gallegos-Ordorica's reading—it is puzzling what the basis is for ascribing to her the general capacity of self-control.

A second and more serious concern has to do with the scope of one's putatively general ability for self-control. How long or often must one be successful at self-control to be self-controlled? What is the range of conditions in which one must exhibit such self-control? Can one be self-controlled with respect to some drives or impulses and not others? Does context matter for self-control? Does it come in degrees? The example Gallegos-Ordorica gives as evidence of Sor Juana's lacking self-control is that, even when sick and forbidden to study, she would engage in stressful thinking that exhausted her more than reading would (2000: 6). Putting aside the fact that this is an example of when she is ill, the text is unclear about whether we should understand her case as one of, for example, excessive thoughts, or instead, paradigmatically controlled and sustained theoretical efforts. Her books might well have served her as a distraction from her illness and the effects of her thinking. Yet, reading the kind of work we know her to have read, this activity is not obviously an example of an uncontrolled behavior, either.

This much is plausible: Sor Juana has a complex picture of self-control, and we can concur with Gallegos-Ordorica's emphasis on the distinction between

the possession of a general ability and its successful exercise. Given her remarks on gender and the social construction of abilities, though, I submit that we do better to see Sor Juana as having a view according to which self-control is (a) *ecological* and in which (b) it is fine-grained or contextual, rather than it being a cross-situationally stable general ability (that is, one that functions identically for a wide range of motives and contexts). The ecological idea is this: whether and when someone is in control is a composite function of both the person and the environment. There is no cross-situational or global self-control. Control exists in some kinds of contexts and not others. The granularity point is that self-control is about control with respect to a given psychological drive or an impulse. Putting the two ideas together, self-control is always relative to a drive or set of drives, in a circumstance.

This sort of picture allows us to make better sense of Sor Juana's focus on the circumstances of learning and knowledge production, as well as her interest in the social construction of agency. Context matters for the kinds of agents we are, and for the possibility of self-control. Some circumstances undermine the possibility of self-control (with respect to particular desires), whereas others enable it. This picture also makes sense of Sor Juana's recurring emphasis on her omnipresent thirst for learning and need for reflection. As we will see, unless conditions are right, she cannot realize her nature, and this matters for what she is obligated to do.

Recall that one of several ideas in *Respuesta*—is the idea that her impulse to learning was God-given and fundamental to her nature: “God gave me this inclination, it did not seem to be against his holy law or the obligations of my state—I have this mind, even if it may be evil, it made me what I am; I was born with it and with it I must die” (149). (This idea is also prefigured in her early letter to the Jesuit Antonio Núñez Miranda.) *Inclination* is here a technical notion, roughly an “incipient action or movement that will have a certain outcome unless something intervenes” (Hoffman 2012: 161). In Aquinas, it is characterized as involving a love for that thing.

That her inclination or drive for learning is omnipresent, cross-situationally stable, and persistent throughout the entirety of her life suggests it is a part of her God-given character, and not a perversity of her will that involves the rejection of her God-given nature. The “necessity” of which she acts is not some localized error and it is not weakness of will. It is part of her essential and persistent nature, an organizing aspect of her psyche, for which the autobiographical elements of *Respuesta*—included her various efforts to protect and cultivate this drive even when costly—are offered as evidence (2016: 110).

What is more, Sor Juana has been careful to put this drive in the service of others, using her intellectual and creative powers almost always at the behest of

others (More 2015: 129-131). She thus makes good on both her obligations to her God-given nature and her role as a nun. So, rather than suggesting a picture where she is not self-controlled, Sor Juana implies that (a) nurturing of her intellectual and creative powers required considerable control across a range of contexts hostile to that control, and (b) her judicious employment of her talents has itself been a matter of controlled submission to the duties of a nun. Rather than being culpable for a lack of control, the implication is that she has been remarkably self-controlled: her will has been dedicated to the correct ends as both a knower and a nun despite persistent incentives to choose badly.

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At the outset, I claimed that reflections on four threads in Sor Juana's work—her account of knowledge production, social construction, skepticism about revisionary theology, and her account of self-control—jointly suggest a distinctive and potentially systematic package of commitments that we can think of as *social fallibilism* about agency and epistemology. Social fallibilism is the view that the kinds of things we can know and do are dependent on somewhat fragile features of both agents and their social and material contexts.

To be sure, it is open question of whether Sor Juana thought of herself as offering anything like a systematic account of the major fields in philosophy. So far as we know, she never claimed to produce such thing, and in what survives of her texts there is no systematic treatise that endeavors to pull together all of these philosophical threads. Still, it is striking that she is not simply a metaphysician, or an epistemologist, or an ethicist, or a philosophical theologian. Instead, she offers a richly integrated account of all these things. Her ecological picture of agency informs the social epistemology, and it also threads through her analysis of gender, theology, and education. As we have seen, in her world, men impair women's freedom, and this impairment comes at a cost to the collective attainment of knowledge. In turn, our impoverished understanding of the world has implications for the possibility for revising traditional theology. However, what theology we can gives us an account of negative benefits, which makes clear the fragility of our agency, which in turn gives us grounds for critiquing the shortcomings of the social world we have built for ourselves. Everything is connected.

If these thoughts are right, then Sor Juana's work can be reconstructed in a relatively systematic way. Her distinctive commitments plausibly hang

together, and that there is reason to think of it as both distinctive in its own context and illuminating more generally.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> My thanks to Sergio Gallegos-Ordorica, Sofia Ortiz-Hinojosa, Dan Speak, and Clinton Tolley for sometimes copious feedback at various stages. Thanks too to audience members at the National Autonomous University of Mexico, where a version of this paper was presented as part of 2019 Gaos Lectures, and to audiences at UC San Diego, especially the outstanding Filo-Mex Reading Group. I am particularly grateful to the editors of this journal for the opportunity to publish this work here.



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## NOTAS PARA UNA CRÍTICA FILOSÓFICA DEL MALINCHISMO

GUILLERMO HURTADO

**ABSTRACT:** The aim of this paper is to overcome psychologistic or ontologistic interpretations of the philosophy of lo mexicano in order to lend it political trajectory. Using Foucault's notion of "dispositif," I examine the phenomenon of malinchismo as an enduring mechanism of domination both in terms of external colonialism and internal colonialism. I conclude that a critique of malinchismo is an indispensable project for a version of Mexican philosophy that aims to transform our national reality.

**Keywords:** malinchismo, device, colonialism, Mexican philosophy.

**RESUMEN:** Este artículo pretende superar el psicologismo y el ontologismo de la filosofía de lo mexicano para darle un giro político a esta corriente filosófica. Con base en la noción foucaultiana de dispositivo se examina el fenómeno del malinchismo como un perdurable mecanismo de dominación tanto del colonialismo externo como del colonialismo interno. Se concluye que una crítica del malinchismo es una tarea indispensable para una filosofía mexicana que pretenda contribuir en la transformación de la realidad nacional.

**Palabras clave:** malinchismo, dispositivo, colonialismo, filosofía mexicana.

### I.

Durante la conquista, los indígenas comenzaron a llamar "Malintzin" a Hernán Cortés por ser "el señor de Malinali". Como a los españoles se les dificultaba pronunciar el sufijo "tzin", convirtieron el nombre en "Malinche" (Díaz del Castillo 1976, p. 193). Mucho después, el término se transfiere del capitán a Malinali.

Desde mediados del siglo XIX, se urdió una interpretación de la historia de México que acusaba a Malinali, la ahora llamada Malinche, de ser una traidora (*vid.* Monsiváis 1994). En su defensa, se diría que para ella los mexicas eran un pueblo que había sometido al suyo, los coatlimecas (Del Río 2006). Pero más allá

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de la verdad histórica, se ha tejido una fábula que ha inyectado al nombre “Malinche” de una pesada carga simbólica. Se ha escrito mucho, a favor y en contra, acerca del mito. El feminismo y la filosofía México-estadounidense han formulado críticas esclarecedoras a la leyenda negra de la Malinche (*e.g.* Anzaldúa, 1987). Pero no me ocuparé aquí de la extensa bibliografía sobre el tema. Lo que me interesa no es la Malinche, ni su leyenda, sino lo que conocemos como el *malinchismo*.

## II.

¿Existe el malinchismo o es una invención de los detractores de Malinali? Mi respuesta es que lo que llamamos malinchismo sí existe, aunque el vínculo que tiene con la Malinche puede revisarse e incluso negarse. Por ejemplo, ya desde 1956, Samuel Ramos señalaba que no era correcto denominar *malinchismo* al entreguismo (*La Prensa*, 1956). Pero insisto: no me ocuparé del tema del nombre y sus connotaciones. Mi propósito es realizar una crítica del fenómeno denotado.

El *Diccionario breve de mexicanismos* define así la voz “malinchismo”: “Complejo de apego a lo extranjero con menosprecio de lo propio” (Gómez de Silva 2001). Me parece que una falla de esta definición es que no distingue el significado de “malinchismo” del de “xenofilia”, como si no hubiera nada particularmente mexicano en esa actitud. Otro error de esta definición—del que me ocuparé más adelante—es que caracteriza al malinchismo como un *complejo*, es decir, como un trastorno psicológico. Más atinada parece la definición de “malinchismo” del *Diccionario del español de México*: “Tendencia de algunos mexicanos a preferir lo extranjero o al extranjero—en particular si es blanco, güero y de tipo germánico—sobre sus propios compatriotas, sus propios productos o sus propios valores y tradiciones” (Lara 2010). En esta definición no se habla de un complejo sino de una tendencia y se aclara que la exhiben algunos mexicanos. También me parece acertada la cláusula—de la que me ocuparé más abajo—de que el malinchista prefiere lo extranjero, “en particular si es blanco, güero y de tipo germánico”.

Digamos que un *malinchista extremo* es un mexicano que considera que cualquier persona, artefacto o idea extranjera siempre es superior a cualquier persona, artefacto o idea mexicana. El malinchista extremo no basa su juicio en datos ni razones: cree dogmáticamente que lo mexicano está en lo más bajo de la escala de lo humano. Quien buscara un antecedente legendario de esta experiencia, podría encontrarla en la creencia, atribuida a Moctezuma, de que Cortés era un enviado de Quetzalcóatl que venía a pedirle cuentas (Sahagún 1975, libro XII). Hoy en día, ningún malinchista, por extremo que sea, se compararía con un extranjero como un humano ante una divinidad, pero sí como un ser inferior con uno superior a quien debe rendirle pleitesía. Digamos

ahora que un *malinchista selectivo* es aquel connacional que adopta una graduación de lo mexicano ante lo extranjero. A veces preferirá lo foráneo, pero en otros casos optará por lo mexicano. Cuando el malinchista selectivo se enfrenta a una decisión en la que hay más de una opción extranjera, elegirá de acuerdo con una graduación en la que se mezclan elementos raciales, culturales e históricos. Por ejemplo, un malinchista selectivo podría elegir por regla cualquier producto francés sobre uno mexicano, pero elegir, por una regla distinta, cualquier producto mexicano sobre uno guatemalteco. Otro ejemplo: el malinchista selectivo podría escoger por principio cualquier producto español por encima de uno mexicano, pero elegir cualquier producto francés por encima de uno español, por considerar que lo galo es invariablemente mejor que lo ibero. A diferencia del malinchismo extremo, el selectivo no pone a lo mexicano en lo más bajo de la escala. A veces se desprecia a sí mismo, otras veces discrimina a otros sin recato. Por ejemplo, si el malinchista selectivo es güero despreciará a los mexicanos que no lo son. Su anhelo secreto es confundirse con el extranjero admirado. El mayor elogio que puede recibir es: “¡no pareces mexicano!”.

El malinchismo incorpora, de manera tácita o explícita, elementos racistas y clasistas. Sin embargo, hay que tener cuidado de no confundirlos. El malinchismo no se reduce ni al racismo ni al clasismo y ni siquiera a la suma de ambos. El reto filosófico que se nos plantea consiste en esclarecer sus conexiones. Quizá podría decirse que las tres prácticas guardan una “semejanza de familia”. (Wittgenstein 2017, §§68-71).

En cualquiera de sus dos versiones, la extrema o la selectiva, el malinchismo es un generador de *injusticias*, ya que se inclina por lo extranjero, por encima de lo mexicano, sin un juicio objetivo que tome en cuenta la dignidad, el valor o la calidad de lo propio. Algunos forasteros, como el falso Conde Ugo Conti en la novela de Luis Spota *Casi el paraíso* (1956) saben aprovecharse de esa debilidad. A otros les resulta embarazosa y hacen lo posible para no beneficiarse de ella. De cualquier manera, a los extranjeros que viven en México no se le califica normalmente de malinchistas, por más que denigre lo mexicano y ensalce lo foráneo. Para ser malinchista hay que ser mexicano. Lo que ya no resulta tan claro es sí los mexicanos que han emigrado al extranjero aún pueden calificarse como malinchistas, por más que desde su nuevo país desprecien lo mexicano y admiren lo extranjero. Si se les critica quizá será por otras cosas: por renegar de sus raíces o despreciar su cultura materna, pero como ya no viven en México ya no caerían de manera estricta bajo la descripción de un malinchista.

¿Hay malinchismo fuera de México? Podría aducirse que no es del todo claro que sea correcto usar el concepto de malinchismo para interpretar la conducta de otros individuos, pueblos o naciones que sienten, de maneras muy distintas,

admiración excesiva por todo lo extranjero, que lo toman como modelo de progreso, que adoptan actitudes serviles ante los extranjeros y que padecen de una auto-denigración cuando se comparan con ellos (vid. Pereira 2020). Podría decirse que aunque todos estos fenómenos sean semejantes, el del malinchismo posee connotaciones particulares que dificultan su salida del entorno mexicano. Sin embargo, no quisiera defender un esencialismo nacionalista que haga del malinchismo algo único de los mexicanos. Por ejemplo, la *nordomanía*, tan característica del Río de la Plata –y que José Enrique Rodó ya denunciaba hace más de un siglo (1900)– tiene muchos rasgos en común con el malinchismo, lo mismo que lo que en Colombia se llama *cipayismo* e, incluso la *enajenación colonial*, tal como la describió Frantz Fanon (2009), que existe en los países de África que fueron colonias europeas. No me ocuparé aquí de esas condiciones análogas, aunque espero que las conclusiones de este artículo puedan servir para un estudio más extenso sobre todas ellas.

### III.

El tema del malinchismo puede estudiarse desde la filosofía como una de las formas en las que se entabla una relación perniciosa con un otro, ya sea un individuo, un pueblo o una nación entera. En la filosofía mexicana el tema se ha abordado ocasionalmente, aunque no siempre de manera directa.

En varios de sus escritos de principios del siglo XX, Antonio Caso examinó las actitudes de los mexicanos ante lo extranjero. Los mexicanos, decía, padecen una suerte de *bovarismo*, que consiste en la condición de querer vivir como lo que no son (1922). Por eso, caen en una imitación irreflexiva de lo extranjero, olvidando que nuestra realidad es diferente (1924). Samuel Ramos recogió estas observaciones desde la teoría psicoanalítica de Alfred Adler. Según Ramos, cuando los mexicanos alcanzaron su independencia, quisieron ser como las naciones europeas más avanzadas; al comprobar que no disponían de sus mismos recursos culturales y materiales, desarrollaron un sentimiento de inferioridad, como los niños cuando se comparan con los adultos (1934). Ramos confiaba en que un sistema educativo nacional bien planeado y ejecutado permitiría a los mexicanos alcanzar a los extranjeros en todos los aspectos. Cuando eso sucediera, el sentimiento de inferioridad desaparecería.

Ni Caso ni Ramos usaron el concepto de malinchismo en aquellos años por la sencilla razón de que no existía. En 1942, Rubén Salazar Mallén publicó un artículo seminal llamado “El complejo de la Malinche” en donde defendió la tesis de que los mexicanos padecen un complejo subconsciente que los hace “rendir tributo a todo lo extraño y despreciar lo propio” (1942). Según Salazar Mallén, el complejo había surgido durante la conquista, pero no era consecuencia exclusiva de ella, sino de la inferioridad real de la cultura indígena. El debate en

torno al artículo generó el adjetivo “malinchismo.” Apoyándose en Ramos y Salazar Mallén, Octavio Paz inventó una perturbadora psicohistoria de México basada en el supuesto trauma de la violación de Cortés a la Malinche (1950). Desde esta interpretación, la Malinche, en vez de condenar a su agresor, lo protege, lo justifica, lo pone en un pedestal. Y ese trauma ancestral explicaría por qué los mexicanos son malinchistas.

Caso, Ramos, Salazar Mallén y Paz describen al malinchismo como un complejo psicológico. Sin embargo, me parece que es un error quedarse en ese plano. Emilio Uranga ofreció un análisis del malinchismo que lo lleva más allá de su dimensión psicológica, tanto individual como social. El malinchismo, según Uranga, es una de las manifestaciones superficiales de una modalidad existencial más honda de la mexicanidad: la accidentalidad (1952). La accidentalidad del mexicano encuentra en la sustancialidad del europeo su sostén, su modelo y, a fin de cuentas, un proyecto de salvación. Desde esta perspectiva, el malinchismo es una expresión de una accidentalidad mexicana que no se ha asumido todavía como una modalidad auténtica de la existencia humana.

Aunque concuerdo con la crítica que hace Uranga de la explicación reduccionista del malinchismo como un complejo psicológico, no coincido con su aproximación al fenómeno desde la ontología existencialista. Por ello, exploraré otra vía para esclarecer al malinchismo: ya no la del *ser*, sino la del *poder*.

#### IV.

Debemos a Michel Foucault la formulación del concepto teórico de *dispositivo*. Este concepto juega un rol importante en varias de sus obras; por ejemplo, en *Vigilar y castigar* (1976), se usa para analizar la implementación del régimen disciplinario moderno. La noción ha sido retomada y reformulada por autores como Gilles Deleuze (1990) y Giorgio Agamben (2015). Aunque no hay una definición precisa de este concepto dentro de la obra de Foucault (*vid.* 1991), yo diré aquí que un dispositivo es una suerte de mecanismo que opera en el plano del discurso y de la conducta, cuya finalidad consiste en reproducir un orden de dominio; en específico, por medio de un control de la subjetividad. Un dispositivo no es una norma ni una ideología ni una institución, aunque esté ligado estrechamente a cualquiera de ellas. Si bien puede tener distintas instanciaciones, un dispositivo será el mismo siempre y cuando ejecute la misma operación. En ese sentido, guarda cierta semejanza con los estados funcionales de una máquina (Putnam 1970).

Mi propuesta es que el malinchismo puede entenderse como un fenómeno basado en un conjunto muy extenso y plural de *dispositivos* que reducen la

valoración de los mexicanos frente a los extranjeros y preservan, de esa manera, el dominio de éstos sobre aquéllos. Estos mecanismos operan de muchas maneras, desde un nivel individual hasta uno colectivo y desde uno psicológico hasta uno institucional. Entender el malinchismo como un fenómeno basado en un conjunto de dispositivos nos permite ir más allá de las tesis de que se reduce a un síndrome patológico o una peculiar forma de ser. La tarea que ahora se nos plantea en un estudio crítico sobre el malinchismo es comprender sus condiciones sociales e históricas; lo que no significa que ignoremos las condiciones subjetivas, psicológicas y existenciales, ya examinadas por Salazar Mallén, Ramos y Uranga, que nos hacen sentir o pensar o actuar de esa manera.

Un ejemplo de un dispositivo malinchista que salta a la vista es que los modelos de los anuncios que aparecen en los medios de comunicación muchas veces son “blancos, güeros y de tipo germánico”. Hace décadas, cuando la publicidad de tipo aspiracional era más tosca, el dispositivo era flagrante. La mujer que aparecían en el anuncio de una cerveza (“la rubia que todos quieren”) y el hombre de la publicidad de unos cigarrillos (“mucho bueno sabor”) no sólo eran blancos, güeros y de tipo germánico, sino que eran directamente estadounidenses. Hoy en día, el dispositivo sigue operando en la publicidad mexicana, aunque de manera más sutil. La reproducción incesante del dispositivo en los medios de comunicación refuerza el malinchismo, lo transmite de generación a generación, lo inserta dentro del subconsciente, lo convierte en un dogma incuestionable.

El malinchismo es un mecanismo para apuntalar el poder de un individuo sobre otro, de un grupo sobre otro, de una nación sobre otra. Por ello, la dimensión política de lo que conocemos como malinchismo no puede ignorarse: surge del núcleo mismo del fenómeno. No se olvide que en el siglo XIX se pensó que la solución a los problemas de México requería de la intervención extranjera directa. No sólo se afirmó que la inmigración era indispensable para “mejorar la raza”, sino que, además, los mexicanos no seríamos capaces de alcanzar la paz y el progreso sin un monarca extranjero. En el siglo XXI quizá nadie afirmarían algo tan burdo; sin embargo, el dispositivo malinchista nos predispone a aceptar el control extranjero –por sutil que sea– en todas las dimensiones de nuestra vida.

El malinchismo surgió dentro de una red concreta de relaciones de dominio. Su origen se remonta a la instauración del régimen colonial en el siglo XVI. La tarea del conquistador consistía en enseñarle al vencido que era un ser inferior. Primero por la fuerza: lo encadenaba, lo herraba. Luego con la ley: le ponía precio, lo hacía siervo. Después, con la cultura: destruía sus tradiciones, le imponía un idioma. El objetivo último de este proceso era transformar la subjetividad del colonizado: convertirlo en un ser avergonzado, inseguro, dócil, servicial. Una vez impuesto, el aparato colonial se organizaba para asegurar de



que todos los nacidos en el territorio siguieran recibiendo esta lección de sumisión. La regla incluso valía para los orgullosos criollos de primera generación, es decir, los hijos de los españoles aposentados en el país, que quedaban por debajo de los peninsulares recién llegados. A todos por igual – indios, negros, castas, criollos– se les enseñaba que eran menos que los peninsulares y que, por lo mismo, debían guardarles respeto y obediencia.

México ganó su independencia de España en 1821. Sin embargo, eso no acabó con el malinchismo. ¿Por qué? Una respuesta es que, como por descuido, se nos volvió un *atavismo*. No concuerdo con esta explicación ingenua. Otra teoría es que se nos convirtió en un *trauma*. Tampoco me parece que esta solución sea la correcta. Según Salazar Mallén, las *condiciones objetivas* que originaron el malinchismo siguen vigentes: la cultura mexicana aún es inferior (1942). Yo también pienso que las condiciones objetivas del malinchismo siguen vigentes, aunque mi explicación del fenómeno es muy diferente de la de Salazar Mallén. Mi respuesta es que el malinchismo sigue activo entre nosotros porque el régimen colonial no acabó por completo en 1821. En el siglo XIX, México tuvo que resistir las intervenciones de potencias coloniales. En cada una de esas ocasiones, los invasores extranjeros impusieron una variedad de formas de opresión que apuntalaron el dispositivo malinchista que existía desde antes. En 1867 logramos liberarnos de los invasores, pero el daño ya estaba hecho. En ese mismo año, Gabino Barreda sostuvo que la independencia no había traído consigo una *emancipación mental* (1941). Décadas después, los intelectuales de la Revolución mexicana denunciaron que ni la independencia de 1821 ni la restauración de la república en 1867 habían conllevado una *emancipación económica*. En pleno siglo XXI las cosas han cambiado poco. A pesar de los esfuerzos realizados, no hemos acabado de alcanzar ni una emancipación económica ni una emancipación mental. Por ello, no debería extrañarnos que el malinchismo siga actuando como un mecanismo del sistema neocolonial en México.

El neocolonialismo es un fenómeno global. Sin embargo, no debemos perder de vista las peculiaridades del caso mexicano: una de ellas, la compleja y conflictiva relación histórica entre México y los Estados Unidos. Es cierto que el contraste entre los dos países es enorme. Cuando un mexicano cruza la frontera se da cuenta, de inmediato, de que los Estados Unidos es un país más grande, más rico, más poderoso. Negar ese hecho sería absurdo. Los millones de mexicanos que viven allá saben que su vida es mejor, que tienen más oportunidades. La asimetría entre ambas realidades es patente. Sin embargo, el malinchismo enfocado hacia los Estados Unidos—o, como se le llamaba antes, el *pochismo*—no puede entenderse como una predilección inocente por todo lo bueno que nos llega del otro lado, sino como un eficaz dispositivo neocolonial que opera en

favor de los intereses políticos, económicos y culturales de esa nación, sus corporaciones y sus ciudadanos.

## V.

El concepto de *colonialismo interno* (González Casanova 1994) es indispensable para comprender las causas de la permanencia del malinchismo. Después de la independencia, el malinchismo también se convierte en un dispositivo para la *interiorización* del colonialismo. Esta interiorización no es sólo mental, es decir, no sólo se inserta en nuestra psique colectiva, sino que, además, es estructural, es decir, está en la base de todas nuestras relaciones sociales. Por lo mismo, el malinchismo no puede considerarse como un mero vestigio político, cultural y psicológico de la dominación colonial, sino como un dispositivo vigente que cumple con un rol clave dentro de nuestro régimen de colonialismo interno. Para ser más específicos, el dispositivo funciona para preservar el dominio de los mexicanos que se parecen más a los extranjeros sobre aquellos que se parecen menos. El malinchismo interno apuntala el dominio político, económico e intelectual de una minoría de mexicanos blancos, angloparlantes, empresarios, dueños de bienes raíces, que ahorran en divisas y tienen estudios de posgrado, sobre la mayoría de mexicanos morenos, que no saben inglés, asalariados de por vida, que no son dueños del techo debajo del que duermen, jamás pueden ahorrar y apenas concluyeron la escuela secundaria. Es evidente que el régimen del colonialismo interno socava la *igualdad* a la que aspira una sociedad genuinamente democrática. Aunque las leyes sean iguales para todos, las reglas no escritas del colonialismo interno dan más oportunidades, más beneficios, más prerrogativas a quienes ocupan lugares privilegiados dentro del sistema de dominación.

En el colonialismo interno, el opresor nacional se identifica, se mimetiza, se asimila con el opresor extranjero. Su prestigio social se funda en su parecido con éste. El colonizador interno *se ve como* un extranjero, *actúa como* un extranjero, *habla como* un extranjero, *piensa como* un extranjero. Todo eso le sirve para ponerse por encima de los demás y exigir de ellos ganancias y prebendas. Es importante observar que no todos los criterios antes mencionados son meramente raciales. El régimen del colonialismo interior es suficientemente flexible para beneficiar no sólo a los mexicanos blancos y güeros. Un mexicano que no sea de piel pálida, pero cumpla con otros criterios que lo asemejen a un extranjero, ya sea por sus costumbres o su educación o su clase, también tendrá ventajas en el régimen del colonialismo interno e incluso será aceptado como una especie de “blanco honorario” (Echeverría 2007). No debe extrañarnos, por lo mismo, que las escuelas biculturales sean tan apreciadas en el país. Por ejemplo, un niño moreno que aprenda a hablar idiomas en el colegio, tendrá

mayores ventajas que otro con la misma tonalidad de piel pero que sólo hable español. El primero habrá alcanzado un grado de *extranjerización* premiado por el dispositivo malinchista. Y lo mismo le sucederá a un joven que se case con una europea u obtenga un posgrado en Estados Unidos o trabaje en una compañía trasnacional o sea miembro de un club español o publique en una revista extranjera o use ropa de marca importada. En todo caso, el colonizador interno tiene la esperanza de que su *extranjerización* sea *avalada* por los extranjeros de verdad. Cuando el extranjero no lo trata como un igual –como sucede con frecuencia–, el colonizador interno se siente herido y traicionado.

## VI.

El malinchismo es fenómeno basado en un conjunto de dispositivos que dificultan que los mexicanos perciban la realidad tal cual es, que provoca que cometan todo tipo de injusticias contra sus demás compatriotas e incluso de sí mismos e impide que se realice la condición de igualdad de una sociedad democrática. Una *crítica del malinchismo* es tarea indispensable para una filosofía mexicana que pretenda una transformación de la realidad nacional.

Antes de avanzar, es preciso señalar que una crítica filosófica del malinchismo debe tener cuidado de no caer en los extremos de la xenofobia y el chovinismo.

La historia de la xenofobia en México ha tenido, por desgracia, algunos momentos de violencia extrema. El rechazo—y no digamos ya, el odio—a lo extranjero es condenable por exactamente las mismas razones que hemos criticado al malinchismo: es injusto, promueve la desigualdad, no juzga a las personas y las cosas de manera objetiva. En contraparte, México ha demostrado muchas veces cómo puede abrir las puertas a los extranjeros con generosidad y altura. La comunidad filosófica mexicana, por dar un ejemplo que nos resulta cercano, lo hizo después de la Guerra civil española.

La historia del chovinismo mexicano ha tenido altas y bajas. El chovinista afirma que en México se halla la gente más noble, los machos más bragados, los caballos más veloces, la comida más sabrosa, el aire más transparente. Para proteger la pureza de sus esencias de la contaminación foránea, se alza lo que José Luis Cuevas llamó “la cortina del nopal” (1958). Algunos sectores del estado posrevolucionario promovieron este nacionalismo montaraz y la cultura popular del siglo anterior lo cultivó en películas y canciones.

La filosofía mexicana no ha estado exenta de cierto grado de nacionalismo chovinista. Aquí examinaré los casos problemáticos de Uranga y Vasconcelos.

En su *Análisis del ser del mexicano*, Uranga explica cómo a los habitantes originarios de América se les cuestionó su humanidad en los primeros años de la conquista y aunque luego se les hubiera aceptado a regañadientes, siempre se les

consideró inferiores. Después de una densa argumentación, Uranga revira: “No se trata de construir lo mexicano, lo que nos peculiariza como humano, sino a la inversa, de construir lo humano como mexicano. (...) En los orígenes de nuestra historia hubimos de sufrir injustamente una desvalorización por no asemejarnos al ‘hombre europeo’. Con el mismo sesgo de espíritu hoy devolvemos esa calificación y desconocemos como ‘humana’ toda esa construcción del europeo que finca en la sustancialidad a la ‘dignidad’ humana” (1952, p. 23). Uranga da una cucharada de su medicina al eurocentrismo, pero también—al estilo de Vasconcelos—busca escandalizar a los filósofos mexicanos que adoptan las teorías del extranjero de manera acrítica y asumen una concepción de lo humano en la que lo mexicano siempre queda por debajo. Sin embargo, este audaz desplante filosófico corre el grave riesgo de entenderse como una declaración de supremacismo mexicano. Pero no sólo por ese riesgo me parece que el análisis de Uranga es de poca ayuda para una crítica del malinchismo, sino, sobre todo, porque no profundiza en el examen del fenómeno histórico y político del colonialismo.

José Vasconcelos hizo una pertinaz crítica al colonialismo a todo lo largo de su obra. A principios del siglo XX, Vasconcelos advirtió que el amo español había sido remplazado por uno anglosajón. Para liberarnos de él, no podíamos esperar a alcanzar su mismo poderío militar e industrial. Era preciso desarrollar una visión de la historia distinta de la que se nos intentaba imponer, una narración que mostrara que el dominio de los anglosajones es reciente y será efímero. Así dice en *Estudios indostánicos*: “¿Qué les parecería a ciertos autores la tesis de que el rubio del norte no puede nada sin el hombre oscuro de los países tórridos, sin la sangre vidente de los cielos claros? ¿Qué opinarían ciertas escuelas de la tesis de que sólo las razas mestizas son capaces de grandes creaciones?” (1920, 24). El anti-colonialismo de Vasconcelos colocaba a lo mexicano en un plano de igualdad fraterna con los demás pueblos latinoamericanos. Sin embargo, caía en la tentación revanchista de degradar a los anglosajones. No obstante, me parece que no es esa la falla principal de su pensamiento. Hay otras peores: su hispanismo recalcitrante, su cruel desprecio de los indígenas, su absoluta incapacidad de hacer una crítica al colonialismo interno.

En resumen, las críticas de Vasconcelos y Uranga no rompieron con el círculo del malinchismo o, dicho de otra manera, dejaron intacta la lógica de su dispositivo. La inversión valorativa intentada por ambos no destruyó la escala, lo único que hizo fue cambiar el orden de los elementos. La crítica filosófica del malinchismo tiene que ir más allá de Vasconcelos y de Uranga. Para ello, como he insistido aquí, es menester identificar los dispositivos en cuestión y desactivarlos de manera efectiva. En otras palabras, la tarea consiste en pensar la

manera de romper con el régimen neocolonial, tanto en su dimensión externa como interna.

## VII.

En este ensayo he usado de la noción de dispositivo para interpretar el malinchismo, pero me parece que hay otras formas de abordar el fenómeno en la misma línea. Por ejemplo, el análisis aquí propuesto podría ampliarse con otros conceptos cercanos, como el de *hegemonía cultural* de Gramsci o el de *poder simbólico* de Bourdieu.

De unos años para acá, en varios departamentos universitarios de todo el mundo, pero principalmente de los Estados Unidos, han florecido dos corrientes teóricas conocidas como *decoloniality* y *postcolonialism* desde las cuales se hace una crítica del colonialismo y de lo que también se conoce como *subalternidad*. En la primera figuran autores latinoamericanos como Aníbal Quijano, Walter Dignolo y Ramón Grosfoguel, entre otros; y en la segunda, autores provenientes de las antiguas colonias británicas en Asia como Edward Said, Guyatri Spivak y Dipesh Chakrabarty, sólo por mencionar a algunos. Ambas escuelas han estudiado a fondo el colonialismo y el neo-colonialismo desde perspectivas que van de la filosofía a la teoría literaria, de la sociología a los estudios culturales y de la historia a la antropología. Sin embargo, como ninguno de los autores principales de estas dos corrientes es mexicano o, por lo menos, especialista en la realidad mexicana, el tema del malinchismo ha sido pasado de largo en esos estudios. Esto no significa, que el aparato teórico de ambas corrientes no pueda ser utilizado para un estudio crítico del malinchismo y tampoco significa que un pensador que no sea mexicano sea incapaz de reflexionar provechosamente sobre el malinchismo. Sin embargo, me parece que dicho estudio crítico se trata, todavía, de una tarea por realizar dentro de estos dos campos teóricos. No me extrañaría que en un futuro cercano recibamos de las universidades estadounidenses estudios sólidos y profundos sobre el tema.

El riesgo de que los intelectuales mexicanos quedemos a la espera de esos estudios no sólo consiste en mantener una relación de dependencia con la academia estadounidense, sino, además, que se alimente el prejuicio de que las teorías procedentes del extranjero poseen más autoridad que las desarrolladas localmente. No dejaría de resultar irónico que, en nuestro afán de liberarnos del malinchismo, corriéramos el riesgo de reincidir en él. Para evitar estos peligros, los intelectuales mexicanos deberemos ser muy cuidadosos a la hora de adoptar los marcos teóricos antes mencionados y de ponerlos en práctica para el estudio y la crítica del malinchismo. Y esta advertencia la hago con plena conciencia de que he adoptado el concepto foucaultiano de dispositivo para mi caracterización teórica del malinchismo. Mi justificación es que lo que importa no es la

procedencia de la herramienta, sino cómo se usa y con qué fin. Lo que he pretendido hacer aquí es *incorporar* el concepto de dispositivo *dentro* de nuestra tradición filosófica.

### VIII.

Quienes quieran pensar de manera crítica sobre el malinchismo desde nuestra tradición de pensamiento, pueden, además de leer a Caso, Vasconcelos, Ramos, Salazar Mallén, Paz y Uranga, buscar en las obras de Leopoldo Zea y de Luis Villoro elementos para llevar a cabo su tarea. Aunque Zea y Villoro no se ocuparon directamente del malinchismo, sí lo hicieron del colonialismo y del colonialismo interno.

A partir de mediados de los años cincuenta, Zea dio a su pensamiento un giro global. En *América en la historia* (1957) y en otros escritos posteriores, Zea nos enseñó que nuestra reflexión sobre el colonialismo debe tomar en cuenta la dimensión planetaria del fenómeno. La lección que podríamos extraer de la obra de Zea es que, si la crítica del malinchismo pasa por una crítica del colonialismo, la primera no puede restringirse al estudio de la realidad mexicana, por más que el malinchismo sea un fenómeno privativo de México. La reflexión filosófica *sobre* los problemas de México no puede desligarse de una disquisición filosófica *desde* México sobre los problemas de humanidad entera. La crítica al malinchismo sería, a fin de cuentas, una fase de una crítica de la deshumanización colonial.

A partir de los años setenta, pero, sobre todo, después de su encuentro crucial con el EZLN en los años noventa, Villoro reflexionó sobre la autenticidad de nuestra filosofía y las modalidades de nuestra relación con el “otro” indígena para sentar las bases de una crítica del colonialismo interno. En *El poder y el valor* (1997) y en otros escritos posteriores, Villoro afirmó que hay una alternativa a los problemas de México y del mundo que procede de un sitio diferente al de la modernidad capitalista: el pensamiento de nuestros pueblos originarios. La ética política de Villoro marca un camino de emancipación para superar el malinchismo y para entender el mundo y a nosotros mismos de una manera distinta.

Dado que este ensayo es de carácter programático, no desarrollaré las maneras en la que podemos aprovechar las filosofías de Zea, Villoro y las de otros autores, como Bolívar Echeverría o Carlos Pereda, para una crítica del malinchismo.

Para superar el malinchismo—para combatir su injusticia tenaz y su violencia sorda—tenemos que *descolonizar* nuestras formas de pensar y actuar. Esta labor corresponde a toda la sociedad y, en especial, a los intelectuales. Por desgracia, en ese grupo el malinchismo está incrustado con firmeza (Tomasini

1999). El grueso de la intelectualidad mexicana todavía se mueve dentro de un rígido sistema neocolonial, tanto externo como interno.

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## NEW LAW OF THREE STAGES

1921<sup>1</sup>

JOSÉ VASCONCELOS

[150] [837] At various times in recent years, a view, which is certainly correct, has been formulated that nationalities are a form of social organization that will soon be replaced by federations of peoples united among themselves, not solely by a political pact, or by the sole effect of commercial interests, but by those more intimate ties of tradition, language, and blood. According to this theory—sketched prior to the war [of 1914] by the Germans and contradicted in certain respects by the victors—nationalities constitute a transitional form that begins at the end of the Middle Ages and reaches full splendor at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This is an epoch that sees men of the same race and the same language divide themselves into independent partitions and subpartitions in combat one against another or that stay apart even when they come from the same root [tronco].

People of distinct languages and races are more or less forced together to constitute nations that are never fused together, such as Austria-Hungary, or large kingdoms that have come to be almost homogeneous, such as England and Spain. Other times, as in the case of the countries of America, on account of the nature of the terrain, one single bloodline has been seen to separate out and subdivide an ancient, forceful, powerful empire [dominación], so as to become twenty weak nations. And these absurdities, due to circumstances [838] of territory, economics, and politics, circumstances which are petty and fortuitous

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<sup>1</sup> All footnotes are translator's notes. This essay ("Nueva ley de los tres estados") was first published in 1921, in the second volume of *El Maestro* (vol. II, no. 2, noviembre de 1921, pp.150-158), a journal which Vasconcelos founded as part of his early initiatives upon becoming the Rector of the Universidad Nacional de México. The essay was reprinted in Vasconcelos's *Obras Completas II* (Mexico, 1958), pp.837-48. The pagination from both the original journal printing and the reprinting in the *Obras* is given inline in square brackets. Thanks to Manuel Vargas and Robert Sanchez for comments on earlier drafts.

from the point of view of spirit, nevertheless take root in the heart of peoples, giving place to the thousand prejudices and aberrations of national patriotism.

Patriotism corresponds to nationalism and resolves itself into the cult of the flag and the adherence to the territory of an ancient province, of a great empire. Where does this feeling come from, one that is strange to a sober reflection?

Before the founding of nationalities there were tribes and great empires. The great military empire was an expression of the tribe, and both arose from the conquest that blindly united peoples together. To be sure, in Greece and Rome, besides the military yoke and the geographical situation, there was certainly a community [151] of blood and a common language, but despite this, both empires consisted in conglomerations of peoples and races united out of necessity and ready to disintegrate as soon as the threat of swords ceased. In these empires, the conqueror does not bring about assimilation but subjugation, does not impose his language or his gods; his conquest is not spiritual and for this reason it neither endures nor transforms the conquered or even attempts to create with them a new humanity.

The national ideal represents progress from such a primitive form of organization, because it tends to form more homogeneous organisms. Sometimes it doesn't succeed, as in the case of Austria-Hungary, because the work of force alone isn't permanent. But when nationality is constituted on the basis of a generous ideal, one achieves success like France, which is admirable for its devotion to liberty, or like Spain, which is great because it knew how to create a new world in America. Nevertheless, nationality is not the final type of social organization, because, like the warring tribe and the ancient empire, nationality is founded on the necessities of geography, on the advantages of commerce and on the dictates of force, causes which are totally foreign to human will. From the outset civilization is a struggle between natural forces, which follow a determinate, fixed, persistent trajectory, and spiritual forces, which strive to create a new order above necessity and above an endless going in circles. This is the struggle between movement in a spiral, which is that [839] of the spirit, and that of the circle, which represents necessity constrained to repeat itself. By imposing laws on things, the power of the spirit is manifest in the social order and in a yearning for a country that is greater and more free. On account of this, each day makes the arbitrary divisions that the environment have imposed on us more intolerable to us, like the fact, for example, that one is a Chilean patriot and another an Argentinian patriot, and so on. In the same manner, our conscience demands that politics is not governed by local conveniences and is not limited by obstacles of geography, but rather that it obeys the dictates of spirit, whose mission is to reshape the environment so as to impose on it a new law and meaning. This contemporary striving to go

beyond patriotism, to expand [dilatarse] frontiers, to observe [celebrar] pacts and alliances according to our taste and not in accordance with material conveniences, this power of spirit that affirms itself in every order as what overcomes is what permits us to formulate a law of development, a kind of ‘law of the three stages’—taking from Comte only the number—a law of three periods of the organization of peoples.<sup>2</sup>

The first of these stages is the materialist period in which the interactions from tribe to tribe are subject to the necessities and hazards of migrations and bartering of products. The law of this first stage is war. The second period we call intellectualist [152] because in it international relations are founded on convenience and calculation; intelligence begins to triumph over brute force and strategic borders are established after war has defined the power of each nation. The great empires of antiquity were characterized by features of the first and second periods, and modern nation-states still live in the second. The third period is still to come, and we call it the aesthetic period because in it the relations of peoples will be ruled freely by sympathy and taste. Taste, which is the supreme law of interior life and which is manifest outwardly as sympathy and beauty, will then come to be the indisputable norm of public order and of relations between States.<sup>3</sup>

The arrival of the period of taste and of sympathy will be sufficient to do away with the discord between men, because though the antipathies and opinions of aesthetic judgment are often [840] deep, they are resolved in jubilation and not in rancor, and the other conflicts, the genuine conflicts, depend on material causes which relative economic equality alone is able to do

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<sup>2</sup> Vasconcelos is referring to Auguste Comte’s claim at the outset of the first volume of his influential *Cours de Philosophie Positive* (Paris, 1830) that he had discovered a ‘great and fundamental law’ concerning the progressive development of ‘human spirit’, that it necessarily passes successively through three different stages: ‘the theological, or fictional’; ‘the metaphysical, or abstract’; and then ‘the scientific, or positive’ as the highest form of development, in which ‘observation and reasoning’ is used to establish the ‘invariable relations of succession and similarity’ among phenomena (1830: 3-5). For discussion of the pervasive influence of positivism in general and Comte in particular on Mexican philosophy during the early 1900s, see Alexander Stehn, ‘From Positivism to Anti-Positivism in Mexico’, G. Gilson & I. Levinson (eds.), *Latin American Positivism: New Historical and Philosophic Essays* (Lexington, 2012)

<sup>3</sup> With this ordering, Vasconcelos directly rejects the ‘positivist’ thesis concerning the ultimate priority of the intellectual-scientific (see previous note), and also signals his continuing allegiance to what might be called the ‘aesthetic suprematist’ theory of value that he had already begun to articulate in his short collection *Monismo estético* (1918) and which will inform his writings on the philosophy and sociology of race and ethnicity (including *La Raza Cós mica* (1925), but which will only find full expression a decade later in his *Estética* (1936).

away with. In fact, discord and war depend upon humans reproducing excessively on a planet whose surface is finite, but education, by shifting the focus away from quantity toward perfecting quality, will convert man into something precious that will be proud of each of its kin and full of joy. On account of this, material conflicts will be resolved and life will retain only the pains that serve for the stimulation of spirit and which prevent it from falling into the conformity which is the cause of all that is mediocre and mundane.

Let us proceed toward the period that is governed by the law of taste! Very strong and intense appetites are still at work, but they will be satiated or disappear, because clear-sighted consciousness rejects these in order to lose itself in the infinite power.

### The Third Period in Hispano-America

To make this concrete for our Hispano-American world, what is necessary for us to do in order to hasten the arrival of the aesthetic period of humanity?

Political measures, economic measures, moral measures have been suggested. Political union was foreseen by Simón Bolívar—the most illustrious genius of our race. His enlightened plans appear perfect even today. Unfortunately, the claim of nationality, the prejudices of the church [campanario], and physical barriers have made it so that it exists only as a dream, while it should be a magnificent reality. In this case the physical environment has contributed to our adopting dubious theories which multiply patriotisms in the name of small glories, at the expense of grand humanitarian and ethnic ideals. This disorientation of the sentiments [153] has brought about the whole of this chaotic century of our continental history, in which we have seen brothers attack each other and in which we have contemplated with disgust and amazement that at times our countries had to accept foreign assistance in order to defend their interests against aggression by forces of the same lineage [estirpe]. Fortunately, Mexico has not undertaken a war of aggression, but if tomorrow [841] criminal governments were to try to create a conflict, our duty will be to oppose these resolutions and refuse to fight against the flag of Guatemala or any of the flags that are flying south of us. For in the very moment that we look toward the south, patriotism comes to an end and the much greater love for the race on the continent is born in our hearts.

Today souls are quite close but hands remain distant. The gloomy days of Porfirismo are no longer, when contemporary thinkers made the obtuse despot believe that it was enough to have a good ambassador in Washington, and moreover that it was necessary to send some rich lord to France in order to

convince the French that we didn't all wear feathers [que no todos usábamos plumas]. We are past those sad days, and all of Latin America is past the period of aping of what is French [afrancesamiento] and what is foreign [extranjerismo], a period in which we mimicked like monkeys the gestures of culture without insight into their meaning. All of this has passed, but now it is necessary that a new active era gain momentum, a great epoch of construction and creation, of bridges and railways, of ships and transport, the great epoch in which spirit, taking advantage of the very force of things, makes them in its manner and unifies forever that which nature divided with the august provisioning of mountain ranges, forests, and seas.

Let us take on material projects, but projects whose aim is not profit but service to much nobler interests, and profit will come as an addition. Let us engage in politics and not simply nationalistic politics but continental and human politics, placing Hispano-American criteria at the top of all of our political actions, after justice in internal affairs is achieved, as the invariable norm of all our patriotic actions.

#### The Economic Barrier

One of the calamities inherent in nationalism is the customs office, which marks the border with the stamp of expropriation and of disunity. The first thing we should get rid of is customs. The 'Zollverein' or customs union: this is the first path of our salvation as a race. During the European war, we were supposed to observe a general pact, but though it was not done this way, we should immediately get rid of [842] the customs that exist between, at the very least, Mexico and Guatemala, [154] between Uruguay and Argentina, between Chile and Peru. A simple treaty of free commerce between Mexico and Guatemala would have meant more for Latin-American unity than all of the exhibitions and absurd projects that the spurious government employed to distract the attention of the naive, not knowing how we could take advantage of the great European conflict. All of the platitudes that were repeated at the time by their advocates with the pompous title of the Carranza Doctrine were empty, just as everything that the hand of the despot touches is criminal and empty.

#### Propaganda Free of Grudges

A good number of those engaging in propaganda for the Latin-American union base their beliefs on more or less legitimate attacks against the United

States of the North. Particularly in recent years, and in response to inexcusable actions [by the U.S.], the Hispano-American liberals, who had at the start of the century demonstrated enthusiasm for almost everything Anglo-Saxon, now justly view with suspicion the transformation of the noble Republic of Lincoln into a vast, menacing empire. These worries are legitimate, but it is necessary to make it explicit that Latin-American union is not only an act of defense, but also an ideal that is much older than the contemporary situation and much nobler than any interests of the moment, a movement founded upon the right that lies in us to unite ourselves freely on account of our sympathies and interests and in accordance with the spiritual law that, today, is transforming social organization on the planet. The hour of rivalries, if it is inevitable, should be very far away, since on the continent there is ample free space for the activity of the two races which populate it, and both need the benefits that result from fair treatment, without the shadow of hate, though protected by the most zealous autonomy. At the same time, we need to convince ourselves that we do not assert our strength by hurling curses, but by correcting the domestic wrongs that are the determining cause of our calamities. To have the right to criticize foreign peculiarities it is necessary to be morally superior to the foreigner, and a people who are subject to despotism cannot make accusations about the vices of others, [843] nor do they have the right to render opinions about them. The one thing that they have is a duty, the pressing duty, the primordial duty, to overthrow, to destroy, to annihilate the despot. Rightly so, the United States will laugh at our attacks so long as they see that domestically our social life is corrupt. That's why we should not grant the right to present themselves as champions of Hispano-Americanism or of patriotism to Cipriano Castro, or to Victoriano Huerta, or to other such false heroes created by stupidity and wrongdoing.<sup>4</sup> Those who oppress and debase their brothers do not and will not have a place in the annals [*páginas*] of the glories of the Continent. [155]

### Despotism and Patriotism

Countries that do not support prolonged dictatorships rarely suffer foreign aggression. Chile and Argentina, for example, have been left alone because it is difficult to attack a people whose domestic life is dignified. By contrast, the Venezuela of Cipriano Castro was embattled because it was founded on injustice and made enemies of the best sons of Venezuela. A Columbia run by clerics had

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<sup>4</sup> Cipriano Castro was President of Venezuela from 1899-1908; Victoriano Huerta was President of Mexico from 1913-1914. Both took office as a result of the use of force.

to lose Panama. The Mexico of Santa Anna, sick with vainglory and lies, had to provoke the aggressions that were so costly to our country. Despots make illegitimate concessions to foreigners or persecute nationals to such a point that a foreigner comes to enjoy better privileges, but just as the hour of justice arrives, just as the people prepare themselves for revenge, the Victoriano Huertas and with Cipriano Castros of the Continent insult the United States of the North in order to malign the revolutionaries they are fighting against, accusing them of complicity with those in power. Then deceived nationals cry out in the streets in defense of the despot, against whom they should be fighting. In this way despotism and patriotism work against the interests of our civilization and make it so that we cannot unite ourselves. For we cannot unite as long as we are not all free, as long as we do not comprehend that the first thesis of the Hispano-American should be the annihilation of tyrannies, of all the tyrannies on the Continent. [844]

### The Problem of Brazil

The force of spiritual impulses is able to reshape geography and erase all the prejudices of nationalism at once. But does not Brazil just have a different language, distinct traditions and origins from ours, and are not its interests going to be in conflict with those of Spanish America?

Brazil achieved its independence peacefully, in such a way that the radical transformations produced from the Bravo to the Plata by the wars of independence have not been manifest there. Socially and politically, Brazil remains united with its country of origin much more intimately than we are with Spain. For this reason and due to the normal evolution of things, Brazil has remained criollo; it has not broken its tradition, it has not made something new to the same degree that we have done.

On the other hand, the great resources that the country possesses, its immense and extremely fertile territory, its growing population, all lead it to turn itself into a great power, one of the foremost of the world, just as science learns how to overcome the inconveniences that excessive heat places upon human life, but without detracting from its [156] enlivening richness or from the magnificent potential which it gives to the environment.

Perhaps within a century, Brazil, swollen with population, will begin to open up new paths; perhaps it will feel itself enveloped by a Hispanic embrace from the Plata, through Bolivia and Peru, up to Columbia and Venezuela, and just as the United States of America coveted and obtained California, Brazil might come to covet Peru and will obtain it, if Peru does not populate



beforehand all of the region of the Amazon that it maintains with its noble hard-working race—a region where Brazil has already made considerable advances, thanks to the stagnancy of the Peruvian population. And in the case of Brazil, there are many other adverse symptoms that must be added: for even if the sentiment of the people affirms the sincere desire for union, why is so much money wasted in those regions when it is needed for domestic development? Together with many benefits, we have inherited an infinity of prejudices and [845] vices from Europe: the ambition for territory even when we do not need it; the nationalism which wastes collective efforts by feeding foolish rivalries but disregards those large-scale projects that are generative and practically productive. One needs to look only at a map of South America to understand the work done by a narrow and ambitious nationalism that has dominated us for a century. Countries that are divided, that are dispersed, disputes about borders, mountain ranges that separate peoples, deserts that extend these distances, jealousies that deepen, and above all, a dream that seems empty, a dream formulated a century ago by the prophetic voice of a liberator that we, little men that we are, have not been able to fulfill.

Facts, we are told, possess an insurmountable force; the hard reality of the facts, in effect, appear to us at times stronger than the value of words, and after all the one who thinks and attempts to reform with thought only has words. At the same time, however, we have to replace this English doctrine with another, one that corresponds to the third period of social relations, the doctrine that spirit is nothing other than a victorious force over the blind law of facts, and that if this force were not able to reshape the surrounding environment then humanity would never have raised itself above the level of brutes. An intelligent study of history shows that the actions, volitions, aspirations of men form a supreme current that runs above the environment and all of the commonplaces of materialism. The soul of vigorous and enlightened peoples constitutes a much more important factor than all of the fates of the environment. The history of our continent began with a change in the geography of the world; it will be nothing strange, then, that over the years we see a spiritual change at work, one which transforms human relations so as to depend, now not on commerce, nor on the physical environment, [157] nor on strategic necessity, but rather on free choice [albedrío] and enjoyment [goce].

Everything I am trying to express, obscurely and vaguely, once appeared very clearly to me, and it was not through the operation of rational reason [razón racional], which is by itself empty of significance, but rather by that other supreme judgment that Kant called ‘aesthetic judgment’, from which it is easy to derive a law of affinities and combinations which are neither a-logical nor logical, but aesthetic and synthetic. This event happened in a theater in

Lima; the announcement of dances and songs of Brazil had filled the room, the lushness of those beautiful and lively women, with sweet and sentimental eyes, entertaining as we wait [entretenía la espera].

Finally the Brazilian performer came out and the *machichas* and *fados* began, alternating with songs in Portuguese. She was sweet and delicate, with immense black eyes and a fascinating smoothness. With a clear voice and a touch of unforgettable grace she sang and repeated a verse: 'there is no place like Sertao', and she moved with the melodious ease of an Iberian ballerina. Watching her, we seemed to be in the presence of one of the sisters of Eça de Queiroz and even were made to think of the inviting caresses that he told us about in his picaresque and magnificent style.<sup>5</sup>

Apart from literary associations, the intense and spontaneous art of the dancer produced enjoyment in us like that of someone who turns to something unknown or very distant from himself, or as if from the bottom of our ethnic consciousness emotions were being born of such profound joy that had never been tasted. It was strange but not discordant. It was not the sound of Saxon 'rag-time', so often listened to but never desired, which seems to develop a sphere of sensibility in which we cannot and do not want to enter. It was a song heard for the first time, and yet it sounded lovely and familiar, like the voice of a lover known in dreams and whose cry reveals the lush forests and boundless confines of prodigious Brazil, where a sister race welcomes us and invites us to stay. Through this the chorus of the song awoke inner music: 'there is no place like Sertao', and the enigmatic Sertao rose in the imagination like a symbol of all of sweet South America.

Many people will say that this is a trivial way to be discussing serious problems. For me, however, the lesson of the dancer seems to be much deeper than many sociological explanations [sociologías]: she teaches that, since these two related races, the Brazilian and our own, are joined together by growth and proximity, they are not going to remain as we are with others, stuck but not blended together [pegados, pero no confundidos]; rather, here sympathy will unite consciousnesses, and amorous passion will break political barriers. Here a common aesthetic sensibility will develop a homogeneous culture; a collective ideal will prevail over the rivalries of interest, and being one [847] in soul, we will be one in history and in resources—the Hispanos and the Lusitanos—until the day when the same thing can be said of all the peoples of the land, in this Indo-Spanish civilization [158] that has already for some time adopted the motto: America for Humanity.

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<sup>5</sup> José Maria de Eça de Queirós was a well-known Portuguese writer from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

If it is true that we are intending to create a civilization that is beneficial for all humanity, then won't our cult of race result in a regressive movement in relation to those socialist ideals that already preach the sacrifice of patriotism in order to better serve the general interest of all men?

It will not be a regress, because the aesthetic era presupposes that not only nations but also individuals govern their actions not by the motive of greed or hate, but by the law of beauty and of love which is innate in our hearts.

Once the economic conflicts are resolved equitably, and since there will then be no exploitation and no slaves, there will no longer exist international enmities, or antipathies of race, and then each people will cultivate its own characteristics without being animated by rivalry, but with the desire to enrich the common wealth of civilization. Individual differences will be a source of stimulation and joy, and they will transform themselves without conflicts into the common yearning that impels us upwards.

Richness within unity, that is, the individual, and each lineage [estirpe] is like a genus in the multiplicity of the aspects of beauty. And in the moral order a lineage is constituted by ideas and the special manner of conceiving of what is beautiful, much more so than by blood. This way of considering the process of history is not based on arbitrary classification, but corresponds to the same process of the human spirit in its development on earth. First the individual is dominated by appetite, which is governed by necessity; then intelligence expands the action of the ego and adapts itself to a part of the world; and finally the aesthetic sense appears, aesthetic judgment as distinct from and superior to the intellectual and the ethical, exploring the universe in order to construct a world that is disinterested and better than the others.<sup>6</sup> Far from the individual being a product and consequence of their environment, the miracle of consciousness is what constructs and transforms the environment, the universe being nothing more than an illusion of ours, a kind of nebula that surrounds [848] the soul and which perhaps is a faithful representation [trasunto] of divine reality, but not the reality itself.

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<sup>6</sup> Above Vasconcelos has already mentioned Kant's account of aesthetic judgment, and named it as 'supreme'; with 'disinterestedness' Vasconcelos now highlights one of the central values that Kant takes to function as a standard in aesthetic judgment itself. In addition to Kant, however, Vasconcelos is likely also alluding to an influential essay from 1916 by his contemporary, Antonio Caso, which had been recently re-published in an expanded second edition in 1919, with the title *La existencia como economía, como disinterés y como caridad*, in which Caso also offers a critique of positivism by means of appeal to aesthetic and other spiritual (ultimately, Christian) values.